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The purpose of this study was to explore identity and self-reflection during the transition to college. The stories of six women entering the United States Military Academy at West Point were collected on three different occasions: prior to entrance, during the first week of classes, and at the end of the first semester. Scaffolded upon the literary genre of the *bildungsroman*, the "novel of formation" (Hirsch, 1979, p. 293), these stories of women's development and meaning making converged into five motifs: family legacy, carrying, a plebeian existence, self and other, and reflection. Their choice of vocabulary and other features of language additionally signaled their stance within this particular educational milieu. The narratives suggest that these students most value relationships; that transition to college begins prior to entrance and extends beyond the first semester; and that the quality of reflection depends on epistemological perspective.

SELF-REFLECTION DURING TRANSITION TO COLLEGE:
A QUALITATIVE UNDERSTANDING OF WOMEN
BECOMING WEST POINT CADETS

by

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To Katherine

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the
Faculty of The Graduate School of The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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LENS

No; we have been as usual asking the wrong question. It does not matter a hoot what the mockingbird on the chimney is singing. The real and proper question is: Why is it beautiful?

Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974)

METHOD

What stories can do, I guess, is make things present.

Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (1990)

SUBJECT

under her muddy
battle-dress uniform – an
orange push-up bra

Marya Rosenberg, USMA '07

*“If I Tell You You’re Beautiful, Will You Report Me?”: A
West Point Haiku Series* (2006)

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The transition to college can be challenging for many students. Entering students are initiated into an entirely new culture, complete with its languages and traditions that catapult them into making sense of what it means to be a college student. As Kuh (2005) characterizes,

For many new students . . . the initial weeks of the first academic term are like being in a foreign land. With only intermittent feedback and classes meeting but two or three times a week, students who think they are doing well are sometimes surprised to discover after their first midterm exam reports that their academic performance is subpar. After six or eight weeks, some have dug a hole so deep that getting back to ground level seems almost impossible. (p. 86)

Even students who are "enthusiastic, intellectually curious, and reasonably well prepared for academic life" can become "easily discouraged, unnerved, and overwhelmed" (Erickson, Peters, & Strommer, 2006, p. 5). As educators, we expect that entering students are trying to make sense of their feelings and perceptions amidst this barrage of new experiences, engaged in a dynamic process of "knowing-in-action" (Schön, 1987, p. 25). Knowing-in-action is the "know-how we reveal in our . . . publicly observable, physical performances...and private operations like . . . analysis" (Schön, 1987, p. 25). Certain occasions, like the transition to college, can challenge the usual patterns of knowing-in-action, when "smooth sequences of activity, recognition, decision, and adjustment" (Schön, 1987, p. 26) are interrupted,

possibly stimulating acts of reflection that formulate the foundation for subsequent learning. Such acts of reflection are ways of making meaning, interpreting, and attaching significance to an experience.

In education literature, the concept of reflection is widely applied to teachers who seek to make the most out of their chosen profession (Calderhead & Gates, 1993; Henderson, 1992; Jay, 2004; Schön, 1987). To a limited degree, the concept is also applied to specific groups of undergraduates, such as those who partake in service-learning experiences or who complete journals as part of various courses (Hubbs & Brand, 2005; Langer, 2002; Preis & Fenzel, 2003). The interplay between reflection and first-year undergraduate students, especially as they are becoming college students, has not yet captured the attention of researchers. In fact, the scholarly literature has neither concentrated on nor validated students' emic perspectives during the first few weeks of college.

Because humans are social beings within communities, any value one derives from experiences is culturally influenced. Individuals ascribe significance to experiences based upon their cultural frameworks of meaning, evident through patterns of vocabulary, employed metaphors, and stories told (Casey, 1995). Says Freire (1998), "Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, though the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (p. 53). Campus environments, therefore, play an important role in college student transition (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). If educators are concerned about student learning and persistence, they must

ensure that theirs is a campus community that offers opportunities for students' intellectual and social involvement (Tinto, 1993).

While all college settings exert degrees of influence on students, perhaps none is as intense as a military academy setting. As it has traditionally existed, military academy education begins by quickly stripping new cadets' pre-existing statuses and assigned considerably low positions for a period of time; gradually, they are provided higher status upon demonstration of certain values and abilities (Dornbusch, 1955). The transition process is an opportunity that beckons further study of how it affects all students, but especially women, who represent approximately 15% of the total cadet population at the United States Military Academy at West Point (USMA). In this hypermasculine environment (Rosen, Knudson, & Fancher, 2003; Yeager, 2007), the first few months at West Point deserve attention regarding if and how the transition to college sparks self-reflection as women acclimate to their new setting, for, as Hayes and Oppenheim (1997) espouse, the aim of education should be "expansion of the self as a meaning-making system" (p. 20).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore identity and self-reflection during the transition to college using a qualitative narrative design. As such, I examined the ways individual women students at West Point make meanings of their experiences in real time, while those experiences are happening. The intent was to show how their reflections and interpretations are essential to understanding and enhancing women's transition to the first year of college.

Statement of the Problem

Researchers have concluded that postsecondary education—attending college—undeniably shapes personal development. As Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) summarize,

Perhaps the clearest generalization to be made . . . is that on nearly all of the dimensions on which we find freshman-to-senior change, a statistically significant part of that change is attributable to college attendance, not to rival explanations. . . . These effects cannot be explained away by maturation or differences between those who attend and those who do not attend college in intelligence, academic ability, or other precollege characteristics. (p. 567)

Broadly speaking, I intended that this research delve further into what it means to become a college student by revealing students' own introspections and reflections at the precipice of the college experience. Unlike much of prior research that places the transition as a peripheral event, I understand the transition a learning experience in itself. Drawing from relevant existing research on identity, transition to college, and reflection, I explored women's emic perspectives as they underwent the process of becoming West Point cadets.

Participants and Context

Since 1980, 3,096 women have graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point (S. Sabel, personal communication, January 23, 2008). There is a particularly unique experience shared by roughly 60,000 other alumni since the Academy's founding over two centuries ago (Lipsky, 2004). Their stories have not gone unnoticed. Women at West Point have been the subject of at least a dozen substantial books, myriads of government reports, numerous scholarly studies, and hundreds of newspaper articles. As recently as September 2006, upon

the untimely death of 2nd Lt. Emily Perez, a member of the 2005 West Point graduating class and the first female West Point graduate killed in Iraq (Thornburgh, 2006), our society has displayed a collective interest in understanding the qualities of the young women who choose this extraordinary institution and its corollary career path as leaders in the Army.

Value of the Study

The United States Military Academy is an educational institution that is important to our national military identity, but it is equally as important to view West Point as a model of how acceptance and resistance, conviction and transformation play out in an intensely social setting. As historian Janda (2002) posits,

studying the admission of women to West Point is a very practical way of assessing the schism in American society over how we define what it means to be a man or a woman, and of asking whether biology, physiology, or anthropology should shape the relentless push of American culture for absolute equality at any cost. (p. xxv)

Arguably, we should not only look retrospectively, but that we should continue the discussion to include an honest and truthful representation of women's experiences at West Point today.

Having been part of the Long Gray Line for little more than 30 years, women's experiences at West Point are still salient, poignant, and significant to our understanding of how to improve the educational experience for these particular women and their successors, the goal of which is not only to create better-educated individuals, but also to send reverberations into our global community as these

women become leaders in military and civic affairs. Thus, although scholarly research about women cadets at West Point exists, we have not considered the breadth of their experiences from multiple angles. To that end, the USMA Offices of Planning, Policy, and Analysis and the Staff Judge Advocate General approved this request for research.

Research Questions

This project was guided by my interest in students making meaning of the time when they are transitioning to college. The research problem and the choice of participants begot a number of research questions. First, once they make the decision to attend West Point, how do cadet candidates make meaning of their choice to attend West Point? Second, how do these women feel as they begin the journey? Third, what are their thoughts when lights are out, right before they go to sleep? The National Policy Center of the First Year of College recognizes USMA as one of 13 Institutions of First Year Excellence; what does that lived experience feel and look like for women? Finally, what do these students' vocabulary, narrative structure, and language elements reveal about their places within an austere military school environment?

Methodological Rationale

As a form of interpretive qualitative research, narrative research examines how people make meaning through language. To describe the lives of individuals, narrative researchers collect and tell stories about people's lives, treating the stories as narratives of individual experience. Typically, a narrative focuses on studying a single person or small group of people, gathering data through the collection of their

stories, sharing individual experiences, and discussing the meaning of those experiences for the individual (Creswell, 2005).

Moreover, Casey (1995) "contend[s] that interviewers need to respect the authenticity and integrity of narrators' stories, to see them as subjects creating their own history rather than as objects of research" (p. 232). Interviews are narrations—texts "structured around a cultural framework of meaning and shaped by particular patterns of inclusion, omission, and disparity" (Casey, 1995, p. 234). The choice to use narrative methodology transferred control to these students at times precisely when their position was rendered powerless by the structure of Academy life; as Courtenay, Merriam, and Reeves (1998) find with their participants, the benefit of talking tames random thoughts and permits the storyteller to have control over how the story comes out.

I collected three sets of narratives from the participants. The first interviews, which took place the weekend before the students took the Oath of Allegiance, serve as a reference point: what shapes these young women's initial narrations? The remaining interviews occurred when the cadets carried many more responsibilities, were restricted by uniform and dress, and were limited in interactions with others. In West Point vernacular, first-year students have not been "recognized"; among the student body, they are the least-respected class at the Academy. When these women sat down for interviews away from the spotlight, they had the opportunity to reclaim authorship of their respective stories. The second interviews captured the women's stories as they were putting Cadet Basic Training behind them and were in the midst of the opening of fall semester. The third and final interviews, at the close of

the first semester, marked an endpoint in the arc of these cadets' transition. Collectively, the narratives are meaning making structures themselves, revealing personal development during an intense transition; they are, in the words of Riessman (1993), "preserved, not fractured" by the researcher, "who must respect respondents' ways of constructing meaning and analyze how it is accomplished" (p. 4).

Caveats and Limitations

As the students in the study brought their own meaning to their stories, I, too, bring meaning to this dialogue, as it is with Bee (2000), who qualifies, "inevitably, I select, place emphasis, integrate information in a way that is influenced by my basic biases, my assumptions about human nature" (p. 308). I first mention those biases here, with a further exploration of my involvement with this research in Chapter III. I approached this study with a background in student development and a disposition to empathize with students in conversation with me. I conscientiously chose to proceed using a research design centered upon storytelling, itself a relational and collaborative activity requiring others to listen and empathize (Riessman, 2002). The mainstay of interpretivist qualitative research is authenticity rather than objectivity. Remarks Blumer (1969), "To try and catch the interpretative process by remaining aloof as a so-called 'objective' observer and refusing to take the role of the acting unit is to risk the worst kind of subjectivism" (p. 86). Instead, I sought to "catch the process as it occurs in the experiences" of the participants (Blumer, 1969, p. 86), drawing data from multiple, intensive interviews which took place during their first semesters.

Another limitation is the homogeneity of the participant selection. While they differ in some demographic characteristics, these women all made the same decision to become cadets. However, although the result of that decision landed them all in the same place, the multiple meanings underlying that decision played out in real time offers rich analysis. To that end, out of this data should emerge a more complete portrayal of the transitional process for women as they become West Point cadets.

Definitions of Key Theoretical Terms

Typically, definitions are provided to put to rest a certain idea; however, my intent is not to silence the multiple meanings these words engender, as those meanings affect readers' and my understandings of these concepts. Nonetheless, this research is based on my understanding of these key concepts described below.

In the field of education, scholars and practitioners typically adhere to the idea that *meaning making* is "to make sense of an experience; [to] make an interpretation of it" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 1). Meaning making, or interpretation, is about attachment: to give an experience meaning, one must attach significance. That significance is rendered through attaching language. Language is the essence of meaning-making; it is the axis that connects self and other. We "make it real by putting it into words" (Woolf, as cited in Greene, 1984, p. 128); "dialogue is thus an existential necessity" (Freire, 1998, p. 69).

Self-reflection is sometimes, but not always, distinguished from *reflection*, a term that has engendered multiple theoretical meanings over the past century, the

significant ones of which will be discussed further in Chapter II. Offering the widest application of the term *reflection*, Mezirow (1998) writes that it is

a 'turning back' on experience . . . [a] simple awareness of an object, event, or state, including awareness of a perception, thought, feeling, disposition, intention, action, or of one's habits of doing these things. It can also mean letting one's thoughts wander over something, taking something into consideration, or imagining alternatives. One can reflect on oneself reflecting. (p. 185)

Further, Schön (1983) describes reflection as a process in which a person tries to deal with and make sense of "some puzzling or troubling or interesting phenomenon" while simultaneously reflecting on "the understandings which have been implicit in his action, understandings which he surfaces, criticizes, restructures, and embodies in further action" (p. 50). Thus, reflection is a process of cycling between thinking and action, even if the action is more deliberation or the choice not to act at all.

A *transition* is a change that occurs "with development as a person moves from one stage to another," marking "times when existing life structures are reassessed and may be altered" (Bee, 2000, p. 434). In Chapter II, I will explore prevalent metaphors that describe the transition to college, including displacement, culture shock, and task.

To understand the collected narratives, I introduce the literary genre *bildungsroman*, the "novel of formation" (Hirsch, 1979, p. 293) in Chapter IV. The plot of the *bildungsroman* revolves around the protagonist (or hero/heroine), "the main character of a narrative work" (Aronowitz et al., 1989, p. 1029).

Definitions of Key Military Academy Terms

The United States Military Academy at West Point (hereafter USMA or West Point) was established in 1802 and "has a long tradition of training and providing military officers for the Army" (U. S. GAO, 1994, p. 2).

The *United States Corps of Cadets* (USCC) refers to the governed student body at the United States Military Academy, which reflects the structure of a large Army organization. The *brigade*, the highest organizational level at USMA, is

composed of approximately four thousand cadets. The brigade is divided into four regiments, with three battalions in each regiment. Each battalion has three companies (the level at which cadets officially identify themselves in the USCC chain of command), for a total of thirty-six companies in the brigade—with approximately 110 cadets per company. Each company comprises four platoons, twenty-five cadets per platoon, including the platoon sergeant and the platoon leader. Next are three squads per platoon, the squad size ranging from five to eight or ten cadets. Finally, there are two teams in each squad, with two or three cadets per team. (Stewart, 1996, p. 47)

The *Long Gray Line* is the metaphor that refers to the continuum of the thousands of USMA alumni and cadets. It is "a phrase that has real meaning to a cadet, . . . that linkage from cadets of two hundred years ago with the cadets of two hundred years from now" remarks General David Palmer, former superintendent (as cited in Grant, Lynch, & Bailey, 2002, p. 168). The gray cadet uniforms date back to 1816, when the Superintendent recommended that, due to the high price of blue wool, "the gray uniform should become the permanent cadet uniform" (Stewart, 1996, p. 99)

The *Plebes* or *Cadet Privates* are first-year students at USMA (freshmen), sometimes referred to as the Fourth Class (Stewart, 1996). *Yearlings*, *yuks*, or *Cadet*

Corporals are second-year students at USMA (sophomores), sometimes referred to as the Third Class (Stewart, 1996). *Cows* or *Cadet Sergeants* are third-year students at USMA (juniors), sometimes referred to as the Second Class (Stewart, 1996).

Firsties or *Cadet Lieutenants* are students in their final year at USMA (seniors), sometimes referred to as the First Class (from which the name Firstie is derived) (Stewart, 1996). Firsties have the most privileges among the four classes.

Cadet Basic Training (CBT), *Beast Barracks*, or *Beast* is "Two three-week sessions—Details I and II—which are both conducted at the Academy" in which

new cadets practice marching, . . . close-order drills with their rifles, . . . field training, . . . morning PT [and] late-day athletics, . . . [while] dressed in camouflage fatigues, [and] learning about West Point's customs, organization, rules, and mission. They receive honor instruction, study the cadet discipline system, and take social training on new cadet etiquette and fourth-class privileges. (Stewart, 1996, p. 14)

Or, as another author observes it, *Beast* is "weeks of . . . sudden-death haircuts, buckle-shining, wall-jumping, [and] scrambling cadets" (Lipsky, 2004, p. 8).

This intensive training is largely conducted by West Point juniors and seniors under the supervision of commissioned officers. . . . The rate of attrition from West Point is higher during CBT than in any other period of similar duration, which reinforces the belief that the training period may be very stressful. (Gold, 2000, p. 147)

Data collected by USMA show that for the class of 2006, which began CBT in June 2002, the attrition rate was nearly 7%; for the class of 2010, which began CBT in June 2006, the attrition rate was slightly over 4% (Caslen, 2006). It is also the introduction to what is known as "'Plebe Poop,' the vast array of miscellaneous

Academy knowledge and trivia upperclassmen demand Plebes recite on command" (Janda, 2002, p. 85).

On *Reception Day*, more commonly known as *R-Day*, "for each new cadet class . . . life begins near the end of June" (Stewart, 1996, p. 3). At the end of the afternoon on R-Day, new cadets will "march onto the Plain to swear the Oath of Allegiance . . . [and] make the transition from civilian to soldier-cadet" (Stewart, 1996, p. 11).

Reorganization Week, a lengthy phrase inviting abbreviation by cadets, results in the unfortunate spelling *Reorgy Week*; despite its looks, the phrase still retains the hard "g," as in the word *organization*. Reorganization Week is the

period of time each year in which the Corps of Cadets makes the transition from summer training activities the first term of the academic year. Activities include the issue of equipment and books as well as training in academic year responsibilities (chain of command, honor, command information, department orientations). When such activities have been squeezed into the first days of the academic term (in lieu of a Reorganization Week), the disruption of cadet study time has been severe. ("Preparing for West Point's Third Century," 1991, n. p.)

For the fall semester, Reorganization Week begins upon the return of new cadets from a twelve-mile foot march (known as "Marchback") after a weeklong outdoor military training exercise.

Acceptance Day, more commonly known as *A-Day*, marks the end of Reorganization Week and Cadet Basic Training, when "new cadets" officially become "cadets" or "plebes." They are received into the Corps by a parade dedicated to the entering class. An official West Point parents' website describes:

The upperclassmen march onto the field and the new cadets march along the outer edges of The Plain forming in front of the bleachers. After their

'acceptance' the plebes take their places with their permanent academic companies as members of the Long Gray Line and pass in review. It is really exciting to see the new cadets march toward the Corps and then disappear into the ranks, as they become one with the Corps. (West Point Parents Club, 2006, n. p.)

Although A-Day represents the first family visitation since R-Day good-byes, cadets are limited in the amount of free time they have and how far they can travel from post.

The *Summer Leaders Seminar (SLS)* is conducted by the United States Military Academy for eight hundred "academically gifted high school juniors going into their senior year. The SLS is a weeklong program of academic workshops, military training, physical fitness training and intramural athletics" supervised by current cadets (USMA Admissions, n. d. b).

Organization of Work

In this first chapter, I have introduced the study, including a discussion of the purpose of the study, statement of the problem, subjects and context, research questions, methodological rationale, caveats and limitations, and definitions of key theoretical and military academy terms.

Chapter II provides the theoretical framework for this study through a review of the relevant literature on identity, transition to college, and reflection. Because there is no text without context, I also include a brief history and examination of present-day cadet life for women at West Point.

Chapter III offers more insight on narration and narrative methodology, and will describe the precise research design, methodology and data analysis used in this study.

Chapter IV presents the first-hand accounts of the women cadets, accompanied by narrative analysis and study findings.

Chapter V provides a summary, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further research.

Appendix A includes the IRB approval, sample introductory interest email and response form, consent form, the interview protocol, and a confidentiality agreement.

Appendix B presents a brief photographic representation of West Point.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this study was to explore identity and self-reflection during the transition to college using a qualitative narrative design. As such, I examined the ways individual women students at West Point make meanings of their experiences in real time, while those experiences are happening. The intent was to show how their reflections and interpretations are essential to understanding and enhancing women's transition to the first year of college. The goal of this chapter is to present the theories within the existing scholarly literature which have supported this study.

Transition theory and reflection theory are based on an assumption of identity, a Western notion that is contingent upon a strong need to understand *self*. The *self*, Kegan (1982) conjectures, is the constant accommodation between two equally powerful forces, the desire to be connected to others (inclusion) and the desire to be independent and differentiated from others (independence). Similarly, Erikson (1959/1980) believed identity "connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself (sameness) and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others" (p. 109). Thus identity rests somewhere between our separateness from others and our way of connecting ourselves to others—*who am I* and *who am I in relation to others*. Therefore, I first present Gee's (2001) model of identity, connecting it with the linguistic theories of Bakhtin (1981), both of which are

grounded in the idea that self and society (other) are interdependent. From this foundation, I examine (a) theories regarding transition to college, highlighting how metaphors aid and restrict our understanding of this process; and (b) theories pertaining to reflection and self-reflection. Another component to this study is context. Self-reflection and meaning-making within any situation cannot happen in a vacuum. In this case, the institutional context, West Point, should not be extracted from the ways in which students make sense of their college experiences. As such, I have included a description of the unique conditions that affect women at the United States Military Academy at West Point.

Figure 1 is a visual representation of the theoretical elements that inform this study. Rather than linear relationships, the circular nature of this diagram indicates that sense making, an internally-located process, can occur during an externally-located experience; in this case, that experience is the transition to college. Thus Schön's (1983, 1987) "reflection-in-action" model provides a useful explanation that captures the ongoing process of reflection and experience. The follow-on work by Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) and Boud, Cohen, and Walker (1993) allows for the reflective process to engage affective elements. It also conveys the idea that even when a particular experience ends, the event reconstructed in the forms of memories and stories, can linger as a source of additional reflective activity, potentially still shaping identity and self-understanding. These cyclical processes occur as part of a postmodern setting, in which self and other are interdependent. Identity, as conceptualized by Bakhtin (1981) and Gee (2001), both affects and is

affected by the dialogic processes flowing between the transition to college and reflection.

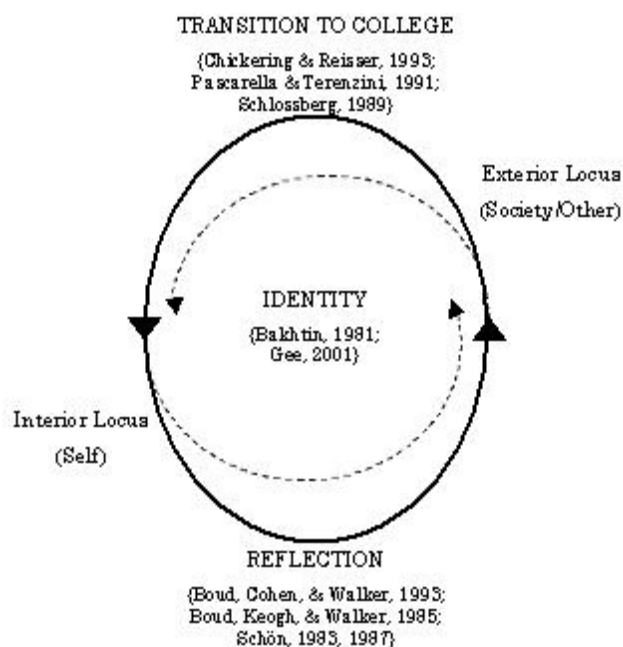


Figure 1. *Identity*

Much of the research on college student identity approaches the subject from a developmental and psychosocial framework (Kohlberg, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Perry, 1970). Such models are grounded in discrete stages of development presumed to occur in a systematic hierarchy (Kuh, 1993). Further, they assume college makes students more mature people who are moving towards advanced stages of growth; for example, Chickering and Reisser (1993) speak of "vectors of development." While developmentalists acknowledge the role of the person reacting selectively and constructively to context (Smith, 2005), the idea of identity development nonetheless heralds the individual (Feldman, 1972), casting all

features of the college environment as how they might best contribute to individual development. As Kaufman and Feldman (2004) indicate, this reliance on the developmental paradigm may ignore other changes during the college experience that have little to do with psychological development.

Other approaches to understanding identity are not so exclusively focused on individual development. Astin (1993), for example, uses a social organization approach to describe and assess the impact of a cumulative array of postsecondary environmental characteristics. Others, like Gee's model (2001), emerge from various contributions outside the discipline of higher education. Gee (2001) amalgamates the "premodern" sense of identity—roles authorized by traditions and laws within society—with a "modern" sense of identity—in which individuals are recognized through dialogic exchanges with others—with the "postmodern" sense of identity, in which a capitalistic economy creates and nurtures the need for new identities (see also Casey, 1995). I have expounded upon Gee's model, as it provides a useful understanding of how four elements of identity work together to shape a current understanding of self.

Identity as a "Certain Kind of Person"

Gee (2001) distills the quest for a workable concept for identity into the process of recognition of a "certain kind of person" as a useful way to define identity. Recognition, a process that is external to self, and the politics thereof, are notably central to identity. Further, in a postmodern sense, Gee holds that "people have multiple identities connected not to their 'internal states' but to their performances in society" (p. 99). That is, who one is depends on one's context. Performance as

characteristic of societal interaction is similarly expressed by Grumet (1991), who uses a metaphor of a mask to describe the act of presentation: "Our stories are the masks through which we can be seen, and with every telling we stop the flood and swirl of thought so someone can get a glimpse of us, and maybe catch us if they can" (p. 69). Gee's contention is that identity may be partitioned in four ways, and there are certain times when certain aspects of one type of identity are more at work than others.

Nature-Identity

First, the Nature-identity is a state developed from natural forces, such as having a certain eye color; when others recognize such identity, it becomes meaningful. It should be noted that such recognition might be unwanted. Astonishing as it may seem in the post-women's rights era, many of the women in the early co-educational classes at West Point were rejected by their peers simply on the basis of their biological sex (Janda, 2002). For these women, who believed they were pursuing a military education afforded to them by the law, it was bewildering to think that their gender was an insurmountable limitation; it changed their perspective on equality. As one 1980 graduate, Capt. (R) Carol Barkalow (1991) has said of her time at West Point, "If we weren't feminists when we went in, we were when we came out" (p. 30).

Institutional-Identity

Second, the Institutional-identity concerns the positions we occupy within structures of authority. This type of identity is sanctioned by "the powers that be" within institutions embodying the rules and traditions of a particular culture.

Students, for example, may seek an institutional identity: for example, in the case of USMA, students may aspire to positions of authority with the Corps of Cadets. Likewise, they may also resist the realities that accompany certain institutional statuses, such as "plebe."

Discursive-Identity

Third, Gee (2001) defines Discursive -identity as individual traits that are recognized through communication with other people. Although Institutional-identity is similarly maintained through language, the difference between it and Discursive -identity is that the latter is sustained "without the overt sanction and support of 'official' institutions that come, in some sense, to 'own' those identities" (p. 103). If someone is called "a multi-tasker" or "conscientious," that person, liking the ascribed trait's repercussions, may continue to find ways to be perceived as such. Discursive -identity resembles the psychologist's notion of reflected appraisal (the "looking-glass self"), in which people learn about themselves through feedback and labeling provided by others (Sedikides & Skowronski, 1995). To that end, discursive -identities, the presence of which has been most valued in recent times, can only be achieved through social interactions. For this type of identity to exist, others must exist, too. Like Althusser's (1972) interpellated subject, *who I am* is interdependent upon *who calls out to me*. As Gee (2001) notes, "it is a particularly 'modern' plight that people must negotiate and sustain a number of crucial identities without overt support from traditional, stable, or 'official' institutions" (p. 105). Because of its reliance upon social networks, Discursive -identity is inherently culturally

referenced. People see themselves in relation to their degree of adherence to society's shared beliefs about what traits are most desirable.

Affinity-Identity

The fourth type of identity is the Affinity-identity. It is marked by common shared experiences concerning a particular issue or topic, with people who may be geographically diverse, which defines an affinity group. Remarks Gee, "what people in the group share, and must share to constitute an affinity group, *is allegiance to, access, to, and participation in specific practices* that provide each of the group's members the requisite experiences" (p. 105, emphasis in original). Gee exposes the inter-workings of one affinity group which touches a chord: the "communities of learners" who share the belief that, using collaborative methods and distributed knowledge, are responsible for each other's learning. Yet this type of affinity group, whose members are galvanized by a proactive *esprit de corps*, is still one that is "orchestrated" "by an institution that still retains a good deal of power" (p. 107). Similarly, students and graduates at West Point are known collectively as "The Long Gray Line," a metaphor that connects all cadets, past and present, referencing the color of the cadet uniforms they have worn since the Academy's inception in 1802. Remarks Kathy Silvia (2006), USMA Class of 1980,

The Long Gray Line provides us with human connections, like dots through the decades . . . we are all connected through 'that place' . . . Such connections lead us to the sincere grieving of a fellow grad . . . We do have compassion, from one soldier to the next, across the decades. (p. 121)

Dialogism

The theories of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), an early twentieth-century Russian linguist, connect self and other through language. Bakhtin is credited as the founder of dialogism, a philosophy that conceptualizes the self as constructed through language so as to be and to transform social interaction. Bakhtin's dialogism

. . . is not intended to be merely another theory of literature or even another philosophy of language, but an account of relations between people and between persons and things that cuts across religious, political and aesthetic boundaries . . . Bakhtin's system never loses sight of the nitty-gritty of every day life, with all the awkwardness, confusion, and pain peculiar to the *hic et nunc*, but also with all the joy that only the immediacy of the here and now can bring.

And unlike other philosophies that opposed radical individuality in the name of the greater primacy of socially organized groups, Bakhtin's philosophy never undercuts the dignity of persons. In fact, dialogism liberates precisely because we are all necessarily involved in the making of meaning. Insofar as we all are involved in the architectonics of answerability for ourselves and thus for each other, we are all authors, creators of whatever order and sense our world can have. (Clark & Holquist, 1984, p. 348)

In much the same way as Freire (1998), who espouses that "to speak a true word is to transform the world" (p. 68), Bakhtin stresses the responsibilities of speaker and listener as participants in a broader, changeable society. In the claims of answerability, to be on the planet and part of a socio-historical dialogue is also to be actively present in the world.

For Bakhtin, an utterance, a word, a moment of discourse, is a unique and non-repeatable social event. Words are considered signs of a cultural framework of meaning (Casey, 1995), or the ideological context and interpretive community. Discourse is the interactional medium of society; when a person speaks, those words are in performance against a backdrop of what others have said or written in other

times and places. For example, in answering Josselson's (1996) central questions of identity: "What matters to you? What goals do you pursue? How do you want others to think of you? What do you believe in? What guides your actions? Whom do you love? What values do you hold dear? Where do you expend your passion? What causes you pain?" (p. 29), people reveal who they are through their language. Inherent within the text of these answers are "the voices of our [interpretive] communities, and to the extent that we have individual voices, we fashion them out of the social voices already available to us, appropriating the words of others to speak a word of our own" (Lemke, 1995, pp. 24-25).

Moreover, Bakhtin's theory of language implies that language is neither static nor singular. Although we may think of ourselves as speaking a unified language, Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia stresses that one language is implicitly diverse, saturated with many socio-historical understandings. "Language is never unity," Bakhtin (1981) writes; it is "actual social life and historical becoming creat[ing] a multitude of concrete worlds, a multitude of bounded verbal-ideological and social belief systems" (p. 288). Thus dialogism validates, rather than conceals, the heterogeneity of utterances and the worldviews they entail.

Yet because language is "overpopulated with the intentions of others . . . expropriating it," forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents is a difficult and complicated process (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294). Thus, there is a struggle to make a word one's own, to place it in a new context as a new social event, so that its meanings are as much one's own as another's. As Bakhtin says, "each word is a little arena for the clash of and criss-crossing of differently oriented social accents;

... a word in the mouth of a particular individual is a product of the living interaction of social forces" (Bakhtin, as cited in Clark & Holquist, 1984, p. 220).

That such labor is associated with the construction of conversations explains why there are not only multiple meanings inherent in someone's utterances, but also why it can be difficult to fully express oneself. Sometimes even the most native language can feel foreign.

Colleges and universities are "collection sites" for the multitudes of discourses. Although it is "personally risky business," students and instructors alike should be engaged in a process of trying "on new discourses, new ways of speaking and thinking, new ways of being a self, and to appropriate them as their own" (Erickson, 1997, p. 55). By participating in these discourses and listening to the ones within themselves, learners can begin to understand the "meaning of their separate and mutual experiences" (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995, p. 168). On a daily basis, this participation means regular engagement in what Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) call "authentic dialogue" (p. 174), where, for example, learners create their own discussion questions, speak from their own experiences, or respond to other learners in small groups. Furthermore, the concept of voice connects learners to the academic discourses in which they are participating.

Grumet (1988) writes "meaning is something we make out of what we find when we look at [experience]. It is not in the [experience]" itself (p. 465). The process of extracting meaning and transforming identity is necessarily accomplished in concert with others through shared language and cultural frameworks. In that light, the *self* is also an *other*. Under this provision, giving enough space to others to speak

is an act of identity recognition that can challenge the discourse of dominant ideology, raising the possibility of new kinds of valuing.

Postmodern Identity

Postmodernism

In "From an Old House in America," poet Adrienne Rich (1973/1993) captures the dilemma of defining postmodernism: "I do not want to simplify/Or: I would simplify/By naming the complexity/It has been made over-simple all along" (p. 68). While Bloland (2005) questions the ability to define postmodernism as a coherent theory, in broad strokes he paints postmodernism as hinging on a "heterogeneity [which] encourages us to stay focused on the multiple realities that emerge from a search for informative alternative perspectives" (p. 125). Rapid change, unanticipated consequences, and ambiguity both characterize and form the postmodern world, as the postmodern position invites suspicion of the taken-for-granted "'foundational' narratives, . . . including positivism, patriarchy, liberal democracy, and Christianity" that have shaped modernity, the historical epoch spanning the sixteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries (Taylor, 2005, p. 117). Regarding this transition to a postmodern society, Best and Kellner (2001) argue that it "is bound up with fundamental changes that are transforming pivotal phenomena from warfare to education to politics, while reshaping the modes of work, communication, entertainment, everyday life, social relations, identities, and even bodily existence and life-forms" (p. 2). Postmodernism permeates identity such that identity, formerly conceived of as a stable and individual quality, is now subject to wide transformation and increasing fluidity (Bloland, 2005). Thus, constantly

nourished by new sources and currents, identity is transitional and always under construction.

Options to Understand Postmodern Identity

Autobiographical reflection, Casey (1995) espouses, is one solution to contemporary psychosocial and existential preoccupation. That is, to overcome the alienated, fragmented self of industrialized modern society, one must search for an authentic, integrated self. Writing (Pinar, 1980) and storytelling (Grumet, 1991) are two methods of engaging in autobiographical reflection, the goal of which is to create for oneself an "awakened state," examining values and how those values maintain paradigms. Similarly, Freire's term conscientizacao (translated as "deeper consciousness" by Pope, Reynolds, Mueller, and Cheatham, 2004, p. 102) refers to the critical awareness of the relationship between the will of the self and the socioeconomic and political conditions of society. That is, by reflecting upon one's own experiences, one begins a process of questioning the way of the world.

Thus, although such reflection is a highly personal exercise, it is nonetheless a process occurring within a social context. Through storytelling and writing, one broadcasts personal knowledge (a "text") into a network of interpreters engaged with many other texts. Grumet (1991) is particularly concerned that agents of social institutions may read and listen to research subjects' disclosures with "public, intrusive, and corrective scrutiny" (p. 71), rather than a desire to preserve and honor "the spontaneity, complexity, and ambiguity of human experience" (Grumet, 1991, p. 67).

Additionally, the political thread inherent in identity compels an acknowledgment of identities in aggregate. Multiple identities within the same social-political framework form what has been called a *collective subjective* (Gramsci, 1980.) That is, one's identity may transcend the singular; subjectivity is not necessarily an individual matter. As Riessman (1993) offers, "Political conditions constrain particular events from being narrated," but "social movements aid individuals to name their injuries, connect with others, and engage in political action" (pp. 3-4). Similar to Fish's (1980) concept of an interpretive community, the collective subjective perspective recognizes that the way we interpret experience is due to our participation in distinct groups (cultures) within a society. Within a collective subjective or interpretive community, members perceive one worldview, construct language in the same patterns (Bakhtin's notion of *password*), and interpret experiences in the same way. Although people can participate in multiple interpretive communities, movement from one to another, especially when the world views of a new community are in diametric opposition to the original. Thus for example, it can be exceedingly more difficult for students whose world views are predicated on the notion of the multitude, in which "self-respect is not separable from respect for others, for community, and for that which is greater than oneself," to adapt to the position of the academy, which postulates advancement of the "independent, responsible, and self-respecting" individual (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995, p. 15). This dichotomy is a rub between two interpretive communities.

Transition to College

For well over a century, scholars and practitioners have been asking what makes students come to college and what makes them persist. Broadly speaking, students enter college for immediate as well as long-term benefits, including enjoyment of learning, participation in social and cultural events, higher lifetime earnings, and more fulfilling work experiences (Cohn & Geske, 1992; Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998; Perna, 2000). The work of Tinto (1987) is frequently invoked to emphasize the importance of academic and social integration on student persistence from entrance to degree completion.

Looking more closely at students' entrances, there is substantial evidence that student success is attributable to the experiences during the first year of college (Pascarella, 2005; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). More specifically, first semester grade point average is clearly a predictor of student persistence (Mitchell, Goldman, & Smith, 1999). As Erickson et al. (2006) comment,

the lives of students who enter colleges or universities are profoundly affected by their experiences in their first semesters, if not their first weeks on campus. If they feel welcomed, challenged, and supported, first-year students flourish. They persist in their studies, grow as human beings, and eventually become the sort of informed and inquiring citizens so essential for our times. If they feel abandoned and adrift, at once ignored and overwhelmed, they do what we all would do in similar circumstances: flee to places that are more comforting and more affirming. (p. xi)

In response, most postsecondary institutions have abandoned the "sink or swim" approach to the first year, in favor of first-year experience (FYE) programs. These comprehensive institutional interventions include university colleges, residential colleges, orientation, developmental advising, academic assistance, campus

activities, peer mentoring, learning communities, and first-year seminars (Birnie-Lefcovitch, 2000; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). In the last several decades, research and scholarship on college transition has proliferated, no doubt in part due to two prominent organizations that collectively study and assess the first college year, the Policy Center on the First Year of College (located at Brevard College in North Carolina) and the National Resource Center for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition (located at the University of South Carolina). As it is a complex experience that affects so many, with immediate ramifications as well as long-term consequences, the transition to college is a legitimate and worthwhile matter of study.

The Duration of Transition

There is no conclusive agreement about when the transition to college begins or ends. Based on the preponderance of studies considering precollege preparation, there is some evidence that transition begins at the high school level (Deil-Amen & Lopez Turley, 2007; Koyama, 2007). Some first-year scholars, however, dispute the claim of transition altogether: "it is important to remember that there is no real *transition* from high school to college, only a stopping and a starting" (Erickson et al., 2006, p. 8). Recently, scholars' attention has turned to disconcerting patterns within the sophomore year (Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000), such as declining grade-point-average and motivation, implying that the transition does not end at the first year. Indeed, a considerable number of students are more concerned about their transition after completing the first semester than they were before the semester began (Birnie-Lefcovitch, 2000). Organizational entry literature supports this

premise, suggesting that one's self-understanding following a transition to a new situation may take roughly two years (Menninger, 1975).

Still, the quest to identify a true transition period for the first year persists. Among first-year experience practitioners, there exists a myth that the first six weeks in a student's college experience is the most critical to their willingness to stay. Barefoot (2005), co-director and senior scholar at the Policy Center on the First Year of College, in a response to an inquiry about this critical period on the First Year Experience electronic mailing list, counters:

The notion of the importance of the first six weeks is one of those ideas that has proliferated in higher education with minimal hard supporting evidence. A number of years ago, I set out to find the one (or several) research study(ies) that could support this notion. I could only locate a single reference to unpublished research, conducted in 1981 (or reported in 1981) at St. Cloud State University . . . While early experiences are clearly important to students, I would encourage readers to remember that there is nothing magical about the "first six weeks." The critical period for some students could be the first day, first week, first term, or first year. I hope that through actual data collection, more campuses will begin to develop their own view of whether a time-bound "window" actually exists. We need a better body of evidence that is accessible to all of us who want to intervene when it matters most.

Metaphors for the Transition to College

Metaphors serve illustrative and educational purposes (Monson, 1967), and the transition to college literature offers numerous examples. These metaphors are typically so transparent within the discourse of educators and scholars that the expressions are rarely acknowledged as metaphorical (Grey, 2000). Exemplified by theories in the literature, these metaphors are frequently cited and immediately

understood, yet mostly invisible to us as part of our language that describes the transition to college.

Transition as Displacement

The idea of the transition as a displacement or departure from somewhere else, usually from home, is prevalent. Although we are displaced from home every time we venture elsewhere, the mystique of the displacement associated with the transition to college is revered in American, if not in Western culture. Certainly the age-old way to view going to college is as a "rite of passage," although not an easy one, as new students realize that "the university is full of the stuff of so-called real life and not an escape to the ivory tower" (Schoem & Knox, 1988, p. 7). Authors observe, for instance, that because first-year students are preoccupied with fitting in socially,

finding a place' can . . . make first-year students long for home even more earnestly. High school friends seem dearer, and the high school that students could not wait to get out of is remembered as a warm and caring place compared to the anonymity of the college campus. (Erickson et al., 2006, p. 18)

Additionally, according to Schlossberg (1989), people in transition wonder if they will belong in the new place. Belonging is of particular significance to first-year students, for whom social integration and success is consistently more important than academic concerns (Birnie-Lefcovitch, 2000; Erickson et al., 2006; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 1994).

Transition as Culture Shock

A closely related, albeit distinct, metaphor to that of displacement is the denoting of transition as culture shock. It differs from displacement in that the term *shock* signals a biological urgency to stabilize. Culture shock is both a "mental illness" and "a malady, an occupational disease of people who have suddenly been transplanted" (Foster, 1962, p. 87). Sociological literature on culture shock speaks of entry into new organizational settings as an "experience characterized by disorientation, foreignness, and a kind of sensory overload" (Louis, 1980, p. 230).

The Menninger Morale Curve, developed in the 1960's by a psychiatrist seeking to understand culture shock among Peace Corps volunteers, is a "graphline" (Menninger, 1975, p. 101) that portrays a sequence of "crises": arrival, engagement, acceptance, and reentry. The arrival period is one of high morale, characterized by anxiety, high motivations, apprehension, and enthusiasm. In the next phase, morale dips considerably as individuals face their circumstances. They may experience depression, realization of real and fantasy losses, and frustration. This process can be painful: "anyone who has to give up some hopes and illusions suffers a loss, and any loss hurts, psychologically or physically" (Menninger, 1975, p. 106). As time goes on, individuals begin "to sense the real values in what [they are] experiencing, as opposed to the naïve values [they] started with" (Menninger, 1975, p. 109). They notice the good around them, and may perhaps begin to speak out against things they perceive are not right about the situation. Morale rises again, but it never reaches the level of morale experienced during the arrival period. The final phase,

reentry, occurs when individuals anticipate another upcoming transition; morale can be slightly positive or negative, depending on personal circumstances.

Louis (1980) argues that surprise is a principal component of entry, simply representing a difference between a newcomer's anticipation and subsequent experience. The new job, the organization, or the self may produce positive and negative surprises, all of which the individual may interpret as pleasant or unpleasant. Newcomers' primary tasks, then, are the processes of sense-making: coping with discrepant events and surprises (Louis, 1980). It is also noteworthy that Louis perceives organizational "insiders" can assist newcomers "in diagnosing and interpreting the myriad surprises that may arise during their transitions into new settings" (Louis, 1980, p. 243). An organizational "insider" is akin to the Vygotskian "more capable peer," someone who aids a novice through a learning situation.

In the realm of higher education, culture shock is a familiar metaphor. For example, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) describe the transition into college as a

culture shock involving significant social and psychological relearning in the face of encounters with new ideas, new teachers and friends with quite varied values and beliefs, new freedoms and opportunities, and new academic, personal and social demands. (pp. 58–59)

Also, many practitioners are aware of the phenomenon known as "transfer shock," originally conceived as the drop of grade-point averages during the first semester of enrollment at a new institution (Hills, 1965), but generally referring to transfer students' malaise in an unfamiliar setting that they may have misjudged. Louis's (1980) surprise and sense-making model usually has been only sparingly applied to the experiences of transitioning college students, for instance, as they make the

transition to internships and work (Walmsley, Thomas, & Jameson, 2006). While not explicitly invoking Louis (1980), Smith and Wertlieb (2005) compared entering students' expectations versus experiences in a longitudinal quantitative study. Similar to the surprise and sense-making theory (Louis, 1980), they found that students often entered college with unrealistic academic and social expectations that were not realized during their first year.

In a straightforward example of the culture shock metaphor, Chaskes (1996) uses the idea of college student as immigrant to describe the dimensions of college transition. Bringing with them myths about what they will encounter in the "new homeland," students are expected to assimilate to the "campus culture" and learn the rules of conduct and hierarchy of roles (freshman versus senior; student versus faculty). Many become absorbed in the creation of social networks with other "new immigrants." While the analogy does offer some relevance, it has not reached Chaskes's (1996) lofty goal "to create a unifying model for viewing this transition" (p. 80), as it does not appear in subsequent scholarly literature.

Transition as Task

Conceiving of the transition to college as a normal part of reaching adulthood, many scholars have illustrated it as a task, a functional necessity. For example, the "competencies" termed by Chickering and Reisser (1993) underscore the college experience as something that must be mastered or overcome. In the multitudes of first-year experience textbooks, many titles illustrate this metaphor: *Becoming a Master Student* (Ellis, 2003), *Peak Performance* (Ferrett, 2005), *Peak Learning* (Gross, 1999), and *Surviving the First Year of College* (Gladis, 1999). The idea of

transition as task also suggests a linear approach, in congruence with developmentalists' progressive stages of identity.

To get through transition, in this line of thinking, one must employ beneficial strategies. For example, Chemers, Hu, and Garcia (2001) posit that self-efficacy, the confidence in one's abilities, is key to a person's successful navigation of challenging transitions, even though in a similar study, self-efficacy did not have an effect on life satisfaction, while social support networks did (Coffman & Gilligan, 2002). These conflicting research findings reveal the irresolution of the self/other dichotomy. In some cases, the internal attributes of confidence and optimism may aid in perceiving the university experience as challenging, rather than threatening, therefore facilitating transition. Yet in other situations, students may rely upon their social support networks, including other new students, faculty and university staff, and parents, to reduce the stress inherent in the transition process. In another study, Brower (1990) conjectured that first-year students progressed through transitions by reframing its meaning in terms of personal values. Students surveyed in his study managed the transition by concerning themselves with the tasks of making friends, establishing social supports, and meeting basic living needs.

Research on Women and the Transition to College

The preponderance of research on women students and higher education does not specifically consider women's adjustment during their first year, most likely because issues affecting women in their initial year continue to affect all women during the college experience. For example, research suggests that first-year and upperclass women students experience similar amounts of stress, have similar

emotional responses to stress, and have similar levels of confidence with regard to handling stress (Dusselier, Dunn, Wang, Shelley, & Whalen, 2005; Toray & Cooley, 1998). However, in contrast with upperclass women students, first-year women are more likely to employ avoidant coping strategies in stressful academic situations, such as self-isolation (Toray & Cooley, 1998). In another study, first-year students were less motivated toward academic goals than were juniors and seniors (Tomlinson-Clarke, 1998). We also know that regardless of race or ethnicity, personal valuing of education, academic stress, and self-esteem are important to first-year college women (Rayle, Arredondo, & Robinson Kurpius, 2005). These authors speculate, "it may be that female students in their first semester of college are more alike than different" (p. 364).

Although there are few reported differences between first-year and upperclass college women, emerging literature suggests that there are important differences between college women and men. In her comprehensive review of anthropological literature concerning the transition to college, Koyama (2007) surmises that the literature is beginning to bear out that women students, especially from underrepresented populations, use strategies to construct academic identities that differ from those that are traditionally recognized as beneficial. With attention solely on the entering student process, Birnie-Lefcovitch (2000) found that women have higher levels of concern over extended periods of time, including into the second year, than men do. Likewise, more undergraduate women than men self-report experiencing high amounts of stress (Dusselier et al., 2005).

Because the majority of college students are women (NCES, 2006), there may also be a degree of complacency about women's status on college campuses. Yet institutionalized sexism and structured inequalities are not erased within a couple of decades (Chapman, 1989). The report *The Classroom Climate: A Chilly One for Women?* (Hall & Sandler, 1982) generated much discussion about the existence of a campus climate "that jeopardizes [women's] full personal, academic, and professional development" (Chapman, 1989, p. 289). It is also worth mentioning that the namer "chilly classroom" invokes yet another metaphor, a synaesthetic case (Grey, 2000) that appropriates the term of a temperature into an expression that suggests detrimental conditions of the college environment. According to Hall and Sandler (1982), a chilly classroom is perpetuated when faculty members employ both overt and subtle forms of discrimination. A chilly climate is not conducive for women students' learning, especially in light of the evidence that women's self-esteem and self-confidence do not improve when women enter college. Remarks Astin (1993):

Women enter college already differing considerably from men in self-rated emotional and psychological health, standardized test scores, GPAs, political attitudes, personality characteristics, and career plans, and most of these differences widen during the undergraduate years . . . A similar conclusion was reached nearly twenty years ago in *Four Critical Years*. (pp. 405-406)

Since the publication of Hall and Sandler's report, empirical research has verified women's perceptions of chilly climate within higher education. Pascarella et al. (1997) found that the perception of a chilly climate negatively affected cognitive gains of women attending 2-year and 4-year colleges. Yet a later study produced a puzzling finding: the chillier the climate, as perceived by the students, the higher

the critical thinking and mathematics scores at the end of the first year of college (Whitt, Pascarella, Elkins Nesheim, Marth, & Pierson, 2003). The authors speculate that, in reaction to a perceived chilly campus climate, some of the women may have devoted themselves to activities that increased achievement in critical thinking and mathematics. Janz and Pyke (2000) found that women perceive the climate to be chillier than men, minorities perceive the climate to be chillier than non-minorities, and students who have been in school longer perceive the climate to be chillier than other students. Steele, James, and Chait Barnett (2002) found that first-year and final-year undergraduate women majoring in traditionally male-dominated academic disciplines perceived higher amounts of sexism directed at themselves personally and women in general than students in other majors. Perhaps not surprising, then, these researchers also discovered that undergraduate women majoring in math, science, or engineering were more likely than men to report thinking about changing their major. As the authors conjecture, "If undergraduate women in male-dominated academic areas perceive that they are currently being discriminated against because of their sex, or if they anticipate sex discrimination in their future career, they may lose confidence in their ability to succeed in this area and may choose to pursue another field of study" (Steele et al., 2002, p. 46).

Summary: Transition to College

Transition to college is a multi-faceted construct, experienced and understood in different ways. Consequently, scholars and practitioners often resort to metaphor so that the abstractness of transition can be qualified in concrete terms. Among the most prevalent metaphors are college transition as displacement, college transition

as culture shock, and college transition as task. The literature concerning women's entry into the college setting includes the eminent "chilly climate" metaphor, representing a perception that the postsecondary experience is inhospitable to women. The purposes of and discourse within the research on the transition to college underscore a strong tendency to make sense of this complex event.

What is also clear in this examination is that there are methodological gaps in the literature. There is no analysis of extended conversations with first-year students in transition, let alone women first-year students, even though many of the studies cited acknowledge that students may be prohibited from fully describing their first-year experience using surveys and lists, suggesting further qualitative investigations. One book attempts to fill this gap by presenting a collection of essays written by transitioning University of Michigan students (Schoem & Knox, 1988), but at two decades old, it needs a contemporary and more scholarly alternative. Smith and Wertlieb (2005) offer "future examination of expectation and experiences should involve a strong qualitative component, where in addition to completing multiple surveys over time, students are asked to 'tell their first-year story'" (p. 168), a plea that particularly resonated with the present study's methodological foundation.

Reflection and Self-Reflection

In the latter part of the twentieth century, reflection captured adult educators' imaginations as they have tried to incorporate it within their own practice as well as teach it to learners. As a curricular element, reflection is often associated with or central to other concepts, such as reflective practice (Williamson, 1997),

transformative learning (Cranton, 1996; Mezirow, 1991), experiential learning (Boud et al., 1993; Boud & Walker, 1990), and critical thinking (Brookfield, 1987; Glaser, 1941; Roth, 1989). In the educational literature, reflection as a topic flourishes in the 1980s and 1990s, but attention wanes in the past decade.

Defining Reflection

Advocates for reflection would agree with Posner (1996), who plainly states, "more learning is derived from reflecting on an experience than is derived from the experience itself" (p. 10). Yet as many have noticed, despite its straightforward common usage, reflection is fraught with multiple interpretations and distinctions within the literature. Often terms such as self-reflection, reflection, contemplation, introspection, and meditation are used interchangeably (Rogers, 2001), especially when pieces are intended for wider audiences. "Today's discourse of reflection incorporates an array of meanings," Fendler (2003, p. 20) writes, explaining those as:

. . . a demonstration of self consciousness, a scientific approach to planning for the future, a tacit and intuitive understanding of practice, a discipline to become more professional, a way to tap into one's authentic inner voice, a means to become . . . more effective . . . , and a strategy to redress injustices in society. (p. 20)

In another summary, Rogers (2001) identifies the diverse terminology among many of these theoretical approaches to reflection, noting that the terms range from general usage (reflective thought, managerial reflection, mindfulness), to terms based on content (content reflection, process reflection, premise reflection), to terms based on timing (anticipatory reflection, reflection-in-action, contemporaneous

reflection, thoughtful action with reflection, active reflection, reflection-on-action, reactive reflection, proactive reflection). Some researchers frame reflection as a cognitive process (May & Etkina, 2002; Mezirow, 1991; Moon, 1999; Williamson, 1997); others ascribe it as a mental activity that concurrently involve affective and spiritual dimensions (Boud et al., 1985; Brockbank & McGill, 1998; Tremmel, 1993). Van Manen (1977), an educational theorist whose work has influenced more contemporary reflection theories, separates reflectivity into a tri-tiered taxonomy: technical reflectivity, which focuses on one's recognition of the doing of some task; contextual reflectivity, in which one notices problems and issues arise from one's value system; and dialectical reflectivity, in which one confronts and examines socio-political and ethical issues. The model set forth by Boud and Walker (1990) divides the reflection process into "noticing, by which the person becomes aware of the milieu, or particular things within it, and uses this for the focus of reflection" (p. 68) and "intervening, in which the person takes an initiative in the event" (p. 68). Brookfield (1995) believes that four processes are central to becoming critically reflective: assumption analysis, contextual awareness, imaginative speculation, and reflective skepticism. Still another possibility is described by Nottingham (1998), who defines self-reflection as a process allowing "one to identify strengths and limitations in specific environments and the individual personality, learning, and behavioral characteristics that influence one's interactions with others" (p. 71).

Some demystification is necessary to reclaim the term reflection in its broadest, most applicable sense. Just as Johnson (2001) quips that reflection must be more than a "relaxed mulling over" in a "warm shower," there must exist a

workable definition that sets reflection apart from daily rumination yet is unencumbered by theoretical jargon. Suggesting an uncomplicated meaning of the word reflection (despite previous work characterized by a much more complex conceptualization of the term), Mezirow (1998) writes that it is

a 'turning back' on experience . . . [a] simple awareness of an object, event, or state, including awareness of a perception, thought, feeling, disposition, intention, action, or of one's habits of doing these things. It can also mean letting one's thoughts wander over something, taking something into consideration, or imagining alternatives. One can reflect on oneself reflecting. (p. 185)

Preceding Posner (1996) and Mezirow (1998), Dewey (1933) wrote, "we do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience" (p. 78) and that reflective thinking is "a better way of thinking," a "turning a subject over in mind" (p. 3).

Dewey (1933) explains that "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the farther conclusions to which it tends, constitutes reflective thought" (p. 6), thus incorporating the notion that being critical is an ingredient in this type of thinking. More recently, Moon (2001) notes that people reflect on complicated matters for which there is not an obvious or immediate solution.

Reflection and Action

The premise that reflection is the last action in the conscious exploration of sense-making is not always sufficient. Many educationalists are concerned whether or not reflection leads to further action—when students take what they learn in the classroom and test it elsewhere, a process known as praxis (Freire, 1998). Indeed, Freire's (1998) term conscientização (deeper consciousness), which "permits

reflection and integration of personal and professional knowledge that affects one's reality" (Pope et al., 2004, p. 102), speaks to a link between mental processing and outward action; it is an obligation to act upon reflection.

In the many interpretations of how reflection and action are interwoven, the one concept that authors repeatedly return to Schön's (1983) theory. Schön (1983) describes reflection as a process in which a person tries to deal with and make sense of "some puzzling or troubling or interesting phenomenon" while simultaneously reflecting on "the understandings which have been implicit in his action, understandings which he surfaces, criticizes, restructures, and embodies in further action" (p. 50). Thus, reflection is a process of cycling between thinking and action, even if the action is more deliberation or the choice not to act at all. During his research, Schön discovered that practitioners in professional settings such as nursing, teaching, and conflict resolution, employ *reflection-on-action*, in which they would reflect following action by looking back on an encounter to see how it went; asking what went well, what did not, and what could be changed for next time. At other times, practitioners would also reflect in the very midst of practice, which he called *reflection-in-action*, a process that involved thought *during* action. As situations unfold, practitioners connect experience, emotions, and theories-in-use. According to Schön (1983), reflection-in-action involves "tacit knowledge"; that is, users may not be able to describe what they know or how they do things because "intuitive knowing is always richer in information than any description of it" (p. 276). Schön (1983) contrasts this nonlinear, subconscious kind of knowing to that

which emerges from the positivist, technical-rationalist paradigm, akin to knowing acquired through formal learning channels.

In recent extemporizations on reflection, reflection-in-action is a cornerstone in the work of such scholars as Boud and Walker (1992), Tremmel (1993), Williamson (1997), and Bleakley (2000). Reflection-in-action is appealing precisely because of its "messiness" and ongoing nature, echoing the process of living itself. As Boud and Walker (1992) assert, "we experience as we reflect and we reflect as we experience" (p. 168). One practitioner further explains that reflection is not "necessarily relat[ed] to a linear, hierarchical process of thinking but rather to a multi-faceted 'round-about' process of thinking which may be entered, exited, and re-entered at any one of a number of points" (Richardson, 1995, p. 1049). Reflection-in-action is intuitive and irrational, an act that "begins not in the 'high ground' of technical-rational certainty, but in the 'swamp' of uncertain practices—in indeterminacy, ambiguity, and value conflict" (Bleakley, 2000, p. 412). As such, the process resists calculated structure and a definite end point, allowing room for "boots-on-the-ground" performance.

Schön himself uses a metaphor to describe the spontaneity of reflection-in-action, describing how jazz musicians improvise as they get a "feel for their material," thinking about what they are doing in relation to the entire ensemble of instruments. "As the musicians feel the direction of the music that is developing out of their interwoven contributions," Schön (1983) says, "they make new sense of it and adjust their performance to the new sense they have made" (p. 55). This

aesthetic rendering of the reflection-in-action concept becomes a central tenet in the later writing of Bleakley (2000).

Critiquing Reflection

Reflection is not uncontested. Johnson (2001) calls into question how chronologically and topically distant the experiences under consideration can be, surmising that the "issues of consideration, reflection, and discarding" can lead to a process that is "time-consuming, confusing, and misleading" (Johnson, 2001, p. 55). Similarly, Stein (2000) notes "learners may be unable or unwilling to confront or seek disconfirming information about themselves or implicitly held knowledge" (p. 3). Importantly, there is the proposition that learners are not able to disentangle themselves from complicated socio-political influences that shape their knowledge, assumptions, and experiences (Fendler, 2003), and therefore, authentic reflective thinking is elusive. As Fendler (2003) sees it, "when reflection is understood as a turning back upon the self, the danger is that reflection will reveal no more than what is already known" (p. 21). Further, although Brookfield (1995) advocates use of personal experience in the process of becoming critically reflective, he offers the caveat that:

To some extent, we are all prisoners trapped within the perceptual frameworks that determine how we view our experiences. A self-confirming cycle often develops, in which our uncritically accepted assumptions shape actions that then serve to confirm the truth of those assumptions. (p. 28)

Also, reflection's primary contemporary proponents (Brookfield, 1995; Mezirow, 1990; Roth, 1989; Schön, 1983) fall short of explaining how reflection became so important to current educational practice, despite their own calls that

critical reflection must originate in a questioning of assumptions (Brookfield, 1995; Roth, 1989). Fortunately, several other authors have considered the prevailing fascination with reflection in the learning process. Fendler (2003) offers that "insofar as Descartes is regarded a founder of modern philosophy, reflectivity—the ability to see oneself as object—is a defining characteristic of modern self-awareness" (p. 17). This perspective helps to explain modern psychology's enthrallment with reflection, often read as *self-reflection* in the disciplinary literature (see e.g., Hixon & Swann, 1993; Schneider, 2002; Sedikides & Skowronski, 1995). In a Cartesian scheme, all reflection is desirable, without regard for its quality, process, or presuppositions. Further, Fendler (2003) criticizes educational literature for placing Dewey's writings, especially *How We Think* (1933), as iconic authoritarian works with little regard for the historical circumstances in which they were written. She argues that "Dewey's reflective thinking was promoted as a means for instilling habits of thought and cultivating self discipline for purposes of social betterment" (p. 18), representative of a Progressive Era trend that sought to professionalize teaching by applying a "scientific approach" to education. Based on today's post- and often anti-positivist stance, this approach may curtail holistic understanding of complex phenomenon such as learning.

Bleakley (2000) juxtaposes the popular, humanistic view of reflection in higher education with a more poststructuralist interpretation. He argues that the dominant social constructivist tradition, set forth by Dewey and Rogers, limits the goal of learning to an instrumental process of self-actualization. Viewed this way, postsecondary education employs self-assessment and reflection as technologies,

"through which a unitary and consistent self is produced, maintained, and disciplined" (Bleakley, 2000, p. 407). In Bleakley's evaluation, however, this humanistic approach discounts ethical and aesthetic dimensions of self-forming in which multiple versions of the self are explored. Contrarily, in a poststructuralist framework, reflection is not focused on essence—who one is—but on existence—how one acts, giving rise to an examination and appreciation of a more expanded self. In a Foucauldian stance, as Bleakley prefers, the subject (the self) is "not a 'substance,' but a 'form.' Importantly, this 'form' is not . . . always identical to itself" (p. 417). Likewise, Barnett (1997) argues that the current model of higher education funnels learners into the narrow-mindedness of a discipline or the functionalist whims of the market. Instead, postmodern higher education should be viewed as a rigorous and collective process of "becoming" by which students become not self-contained or transcendental individuals, but social actors with a self-referential capacity. Within the current postsecondary system, Barnett (1997) warns, "'Reflection' thus points to the ability to move oneself forward. There is at work, however, an instrumental agenda. One is being asked to move forward by oneself but not *for* oneself" (p. 91).

Fostering Reflection

Many educators mention the use of journals and diaries as autobiographical devices to facilitate reflection (Brookfield, 1995; Caffarella, 1996; Hubbs & Brand, 2005; Langer, 2002; Mackintosh, 1998; Williamson, 1997), which, according to Bleakley (2000), are often monotonously confessional. Fendler (2003) agrees, adding that autobiographies are most often written around stereotypical identifying information, such as race, class, gender, age, ability, and sexuality. To justify

reflective assignments, some practitioners have sought ways to measure the outcomes and depth of students' reflection in learning settings (Kember et al., 1999; May & Etkina, 2002). Further, adult education theorist Caffarella (1996) recognizes potential contributions of literature to reflection, advocating the use of literature, poetry, and storytelling as part of a diverse teaching repertoire, in an aim to incorporate participants' feelings in the learning activity. Linde (1993) claims that narrative—storytelling—encourages development of a private, internal sense of self, as well as the self that is conveyed to others. She believes that this derives from the sense of reflexivity involved in narrative: the ability to reflect upon the self that occurs when the act of narration creates a split between the narrator and the protagonist of the story. As learners observe themselves as protagonists in their own stories, they become critically self-reflective of their learning. However, Hovet (1990), who had students formulate stories about their professional identities as part of career advising, cautions that storytelling may prioritize autonomy and separation at the expense of relationships and community. Although at times contradictory, these findings together express educators' desire to determine the best way to incorporate reflection into the learning environment.

Research on Women and Reflection

Surprisingly, the literature has very little to say on how the act and process of reflection may differ for women and men. Ten years ago, Manbeck and Bruhl (1997) presented a conference paper, the purpose of which was to open a dialogue on gender perspectives in adult education. Specifically, they were concerned that on the whole, the several of the widely accepted tenets of adult education theory were

marginalizing male students. Of note, one of their observations as practitioners was that learning through self-reflection is more acceptable to women than to men. As it turns out, few scholars have joined Manbeck's and Bruhl's (1997) discussion. In the decade since they presented their paper, no research has been published that specifically compares and contrasts undergraduate women and men and how they learn through reflection. In a broader look at adult education, Rogers (2006) arrived at a similar conclusion: current literature on lifelong learning ignores and overlooks gender issues. He posits that because adult education theory is concerned with individual trajectories, researchers have been reluctant to consolidate experiences into gendered groups for comparison. Regardless, what does exist is tenuously related research regarding the similarities and differences for undergraduate men and women, leaving us with unresolved speculation about how men and women reflect and experience the process of reflection differently.

Among the published literature that provides some context for comparing reflection between genders, Hoffman (1992), in summarizing higher education research including the Astin surveys, concludes based upon the psychological research on college students, women and men "draw upon similar behavioral, intellectual, and emotional repertoires in their day-to-day lives" (Hoffman, 1992, p. 201). Given that Boud et al. (1985) hold that emotion is a significant component of reflection, perhaps any differences in the process of reflection for women and men would not be very pronounced.

According to some, however, women in Western cultures are better able to tap into those emotions, and generally appear to have greater experience in

discussion, thinking about, and explaining their inner thoughts and feelings (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997). Beutel and Marini (1995) attest that in the United States, female adolescent relationships are characterized by greater emotional intimacy, self-disclosure, and supportiveness, whereas male adolescent relationships emphasize mutual involvement in activities, impersonal gregariousness, and camaraderie. Belenky et al. (1997) note that in their development as connected learners, women actively seek self-understanding and do so with "intense self-reflection and self-analysis" (p. 135). As Csank and Conway (2004) indicate,

this openness to inner experience can mesh well with women's greater interpersonal and interdependent socialization experience. Women can be open both to others' and their own experiences . . . [and] be both caring and sensitive to the needs of others and address their own needs and goals. (p. 470)

The authors continue, pointing out that highly individualistic and self-assertive individuals will be less likely to display tendencies to self-reflect upon their own characteristics.

Many of the major educational theories pertaining to reflection, including Mezirow (1990) and Brockbank and McGill (1998) emphasize dialogue. A prerequisite to dialogue, verbal ability is not delineated along gender lines. As Hoffman (1992) reports, in "the major research undertaken since 1974, the majority of it on college students, they report *reductions* in sex differences in verbal abilities" (Hoffman, 1992, p. 201, emphasis in original). Additionally, research results are also mixed on the differences between men and women on scales of private self-

consciousness—the propensity to attend to one's own thoughts and feelings—and public self-consciousness—being aware of oneself as a social actor (Csank & Conway, 2004). Any differences in dialogue—influenced by both verbal ability and awareness of self and other—do not appear to be explained by gender.

Context: The United States Military Academy at West Point

The mission of USMA is

to educate, train, and inspire the Corps of Cadets so that each graduate is a commissioned leader of character committed to the values of Duty, Honor, Country and prepared for a career of professional excellence and service to the Nation as an officer in the United States Army. (Hagenbeck, 2006)

Each summer, USMA welcomes a new class of approximately 1,200 women and men (U. S. GAO, 1994) between the ages of 17 and 23 (Grant et al., 2002). They are selected from as many as 14,000 applications (Gold, 2000); about 20% of the total number of applicants will qualify as candidates for admission (U. S. GAO, 1994). Admitted students have met academic and physical standards and have been nominated by a congressional or other official nominating source (U. S. GAO, 1994). Applicants may not be married, pregnant, or have legal obligations to support children (dependents) (Grant et al., 2002).

Upon entrance to West Point, these model students undergo an intense transformation into cadet life, full with strict limitations placed on course selection, social interactions, and free time (Gold, 2000). Those who are familiar with USMA refer to the collective total of these transformations as "The West Point Experience" (Priest & Beach, 1998). As members of the Corps of Cadets, they receive free room, board, tuition, and medical care (U. S. GAO, 1994) and are paid approximately

\$7,200 a year (USMA Admissions, n.d.a), part of which covers the cost of uniforms, haircuts, and other sundry details of military life. Education scholar Patricia Cross (1996), in an address to faculty at West Point and the other service academies cautions that

. . . your institutions are likely to have more impact—for better or worse—on your students than almost any other kind of institution of higher education in the nation. Therefore, be very careful about what you aim for because you have a better than average chance of accomplishing it. Why? Because, quite simply, your institutions have an uncommon concentration of the characteristics that have been shown in the research of the past 30 years to have an impact on students. (p. 1)

The characteristics to which Cross alludes are West Point's residential campus, full-time status on the part of all students, the coherence of curricular and extra-curricular programs, and a required first-year common experience. Because all cadets are exposed to the same conditions—same meals, same living environment, similar academic schedules, centralized medical care—they are viewed as optimal subjects for study, especially research related to health and psychology (i.e., Gold, 2000).

Life at West Point

According to an oft-cited study conducted half a century ago, military academy education begins by quickly stripping the new cadets' pre-existing statuses and assigned considerably low positions for a period of time; gradually, they are provided higher status upon demonstration of certain values and abilities (Dornbusch, 1955). After this indoctrination process, cadets are granted higher status and privilege as members of an elite group that builds self-esteem, fosters

further identification with the institutional values and behaviors, and prepares them for future higher status roles as officers (Dornbusch, 1955). Yet more recent research is not conclusive as to whether or not military academy socialization, where rewards and sanctions are lavishly used to encourage appropriate behavior, may "create" a new value set for the individual, which the individual must then assimilate, as much as it clarifies and solidifies those values that the new cadet brings to the academy and for which the academy has selected (Franke, 2000; Priest & Beach, 1998).

The process of becoming a West Point cadet has often been cloaked in the kind of mystery reserved for fraternities and other secret societies. In recent years, however, West Point has sought more exposure through media, including two television documentaries, one for PBS and the other for National Geographic, to boost its popularity and esteem. Colorful, photographic essays, released to coincide with the Academy's bicentennial in 2002, herald cadet life and custom. Although it is not by any means a scholarly review of the academy, one salient account is David Lipsky's *Absolutely American* (2004), first undertaken as a brief assignment for *Rolling Stone* magazine, but which turned into a four-year long "extended tour of hanging out" (Lipsky, 2004, p. xiv). His exposé is intriguing not for a mainstream patriotic stance, but that he writes with the cadets in mind, even cadets who are less than ideal. From his perspective, readers can visualize and understand the components of cadet life, to minimalist detail: "Cadets wake up each morning at 0630; they pour through their doors looking slightly seasick. Plebes . . . stand in the

hallways at full attention, chanting out the uniform of the day. This is *calling minutes . . .*" (pp. 36-37).

Lipsky (2004) validates the rumors of cadet hardship that are commonplace in discussions among those with limited or unverified knowledge of what happens to plebes at USMA. Although the no-haze policy has been enforced since 1997 when Commandant General John Abizaid arrived (Lipsky, 2004, p. 21), cadets endure a particularly unusual transition to academic life on this college campus. Lipsky observes:

A student at West Point is assigned five hours of homework each night, but a cadet's daily schedule allows for no more than three hours of study time. Then there's what's known as Plebe Knowledge: cadets are required to memorize pages of regulations, attack strategies, terrain, weapons, mottos and traditions. They also master greetings: within days of arrival, a plebe has to know the names of 125 cadets in his or her company—no mean feat when all 4,000 cadets on post are dressed and barbered the same. (Lipsky, 2004, p. 9)

Forest (2003), a professor and assistant dean at USMA, corroborates Lipsky's observations: not only do cadets attend classes, but every afternoon is full with extra-curricular events like intramural sports, physical development activities, military training exercises, cadet corps leadership and organizational meetings. Midnight is "lights out" and is strictly enforced, so that all overhead lights are off by that hour, although cadets often study late into the night using desk lamps (Forest, 2003). The curriculum, athletic requirements, military training, and every other closely monitored minute are so intense that Campbell (1995) summarizes that West Point's "pedagogy is based on the principle of demanding each of the 4,000 cadets accomplish far more than is humanly possible" (p. 1). Likewise, when cadets were

surveyed in a 2003 report for the House of Representatives, even though a large majority (93%) rated the overall academic program as good to excellent, nearly 63% of cadets reported that they thought their academic workload to be too heavy. It should not be surprising, then, that a majority of cadets surveyed (67%) also reported that they had inadequate time to handle personal affairs (U. S. GAO, 2003b).

Women at West Point

A continually evolving institution, leaders at West Point must balance the requirements of the federal government and present administration while carving its niche in the competitive market of higher education. "Over the past twenty years, West Point has reinvented itself as a 'tier-one college,' the kind of school that promises not just a future but a lifestyle . . . At the new West Point there's no hazing, there are academic majors" (Lipsky, 2004, pp. 65-66). It is against this backdrop that potential applicants read that West Point is

renowned as an historic and distinguished military academy, and a leading, progressive institution of higher education . . . graduates historically have been sought for high-level civilian and military leadership positions, including two U. S. Presidents, several ambassadors, state governors, legislators, judges, cabinet members, educators, astronauts, engineers, and corporate executives. (USMA Admissions, n.d.a)

Yet a quip familiar to insiders, "West Point represents two hundred years of tradition unhampered by progress" (Lipsky, 2004, p. 19), bespeaks the slow pace at which the Academy adapts to cultural changes. Part of this slowness is institutional: the Academy maintains many policies and traditions that perpetuate organizational culture (Priest & Beach, 1998). Thus it is not entirely possible to characterize

precisely the modern climate at West Point; from one vantage, there is little ambiguity in ritualistic happenings, but from another perspective, multiple and competing realities of this institution make for striking units of analysis.

At the heart of this dichotomous place are women, who have always had a complicated relationship with the military and war. "Athena, the goddess of war, whose helmet emblazons the West Point crest has, for most of her history performed the role of silent muse rather than agent on the battlefield," writes Katharine Goodland (2006, p. 9), member of the first class of women at West Point. But when women were admitted to West Point in 1976 as part of the Class of 1980, "we could no longer pretend that these roles were secondary. Athena stepped down from her elevated place and walked through the gates of the United States Military Academy" (Goodland, 2006, p. 9).

Number of Women

Women cadets at West Point usually comprise between 14% and 17% of each class, a "class composition goal," set by the Department of the Army (McDonald, 2006; U. S. GAO, 2003a), which reflects the proportion of women in the U.S. Army (U. S. GAO, 1994). Pershing's (2001) research indicates that women at the United States Naval Academy still remain a highly visible token population, a term defined by sociologist Kanter (1977) to describe women's entry into large male-dominated civilian corporations. Kanter (1977) puts forth that tokens comprise a group numbering 15% or less within a total population. Tokens are highly visible, which in turn intensifies polarization between men and women. In the case of the military academy, even the all-important uniform will not erase the visibility of women in the

regiment (Yoder, Adams, & Prince, 1983). Women are in the difficult position of trying not to perform too well, but must work twice as hard to be viewed as competent. Additionally, women who are tokens find themselves pressured to perform, socially isolated, and forced into stereotyped, limiting roles. In the military, for example, women are very often stereotyped as "sluts or lesbians" (Timmons, 1992, p. 21).

As such a small percentage of the Corps of Cadets, it is conceivable to believe that women cadets might bond together to persevere through the difficult times. Research, however is contradictory. Yoder, Adams, and Prince (1983) speculated from research on the first several West Point classes that included women that they would cluster in intra-gender groups to provide informational and moral support, if situational constraints are reduced. Janda (2002), however, notes that women among the first classes often were more competitive and aloof towards other women, especially women in junior classes, as the upperclasswomen were apprehensive newer students might inadvertently erase their years of hard work with a single poor cadet performance. More recent research on a similar group of students, women midshipmen at the United States Naval Academy, revealed that women are reluctant to form intimate intra-gender friendships (Pershing, 2001). Similarly, another study observed that networks among women at West Point are slow to form (Campbell, 1995). Amy Christian Sebastian, one of the first American Indian women to graduate from West Point, observed that instead of pulling together, women competed against one another, remarking, "It can get real lonely there" (as cited in Morris, 1992, p. 62).

Women in Combat

Scholars of women and the military agree that the opening of West Point in 1976 to women failed to address one central argument: the issue of women in combat. To do so, proponents of integration of women would have had to challenge the combat exclusion laws (Francke, 1997), but they instead chose to focus on the specific academies' stuffy unwillingness to change admissions policies. As a result, those combat exclusion laws prevented women's full assimilation into West Point, as "the ethos at the academies revolved around combat" (Francke, 1997, p. 195). Indeed, there is an informal feeling at the Academy, mirroring that of the Army, that the combat arms branches, particularly the infantry and armor, are more prestigious than the combat service support branches. Lipsky (2004) glibly comments, "Tell a West Point administrator you're considering Field Artillery, he might nod. Tell him you're thinking Infantry, he'll clap you on the back and grin" (p. 4). The esteem of combat arms service is manifested into a perception that combat-linked positions are the avenue for military promotion and advancement.

In 1982, Holm observed, "the greatest obstacle the academies encountered in integrating women was, and continues to be, the attitudes of men—faculty members and students" (p. 311). Such stances are not unique to West Point and surfaced in the later gender integration at Virginia Military Institute (Diamond & Kimmel, 2002). Forms of resistance still plague women's integration, despite the increasing numbers of women entering military professions. A common explanation for this resistance is that women are still excluded from combat, even as women's presence at the service academies has advanced the women in combat issue. The most

common objections to expanding women's roles are the belief that most women lack the physical qualifications for the off-limits positions and the belief that women's presence would disrupt unit cohesion (Miller & Williams, 2001). Indeed, military policies regarding women have changed dramatically since the Persian Gulf War: women may now fly combat aircraft and serve on most combat ships, and the Department of Defense eliminated the "risk rule" prohibiting military women from entering areas deemed combat zones (Miller & Williams, 2001). Among remaining policy restrictions, however, women may not serve in most Army combat positions in infantry and armor, with the exception of maneuvering brigade headquarters (Reed, 1999). However, in light of recent world conflicts, it is quite apparent that even service and support units can come under direct fire. Still, until the issue is resolved, "women at the academies will continue to be regarded, to some degree, as less than fully participating members of their military society" (Holm, 1992, p. 312).

Sexual Harassment and Discrimination

Sexual harassment and discrimination have been present at West Point, just as the issues have plagued the larger United States Army. Timmons (1992) points to a disconnect between society and the military, arguing "the appropriate behavior for women in all services contradicts societal gender norms. It is impossible for women to behave like 'ideal' women and 'ideal' soldiers" (p. 20). Similarly, Rogan (1981) observes that

military women are exposed . . . to the effects of society's prejudices about appropriate male and female behavior . . . Army women are required to become effective soldiers, in just the same way that men are, and the process leads us to question all our traditional ideas about masculinity and femininity. (p. 29)

As such, women soldiers, like women across all branches of service, have often been stereotyped as homosexual, especially if they perform well in their duties. On the contrary, servicewomen who are too feminine or pretty can be singled out and expunged (Timmons, 1992), a practice that verifiably occurred in the first class of women at West Point (Janda, 2002).

Over the years, the West Point and the Army have worked to eliminate sexual harassment and discrimination, but the work is not complete. In a 1994 survey on sexual harassment at the service academies published by the General Accounting (now Accountability) Office, over half of the women experienced harassment in the form of "mocking gestures," offensive posters or graffiti and "derogatory comments" at least once a month (U. S. GAO, 1995, p. 11). Fifteen percent of military academy women—nearly one in seven—reported "unwanted sexual advances" at least a couple of times a month in 1994 (U. S. GAO, 1995, p. 11). The most common type of reported behavior involved a male cadet entering a female cadet's room after hours and making unwanted sexual advances (such as kissing, touching, fondling) toward the sleeping student (U. S. GAO, 1994). In 2005, a report released by the Defense Manpower Data Center, part of the U. S. Department of Defense, 96% of women cadets reported experiencing sexist behavior at the academy over the past school year (Cook, Jones, Lipari, & Lancaster, 2005). Further, the survey found that 6% of female and 1% of male cadets at USMA indicated they experienced sexual assault during the 2004-2005 academic year (Cook et al., 2005). Francke (1997) observed that the perceived cost of reporting discrimination or harassment was high, despite cadets' confidence that the Academy would investigate

reported incidents and issue discipline. The Academy itself has recognized the potential for women to feel victimized by the incident-reporting process (U. S. GAO, 1994). Similarly, in the 2005 report, almost all cadets (98%) indicated they knew how to report incidents of harassment and assault, but less than half of the women cadets (41%) who experienced sexual assault reported the incident to their chains of command (Cook et al., 2005).

It is difficult to curb discrimination when it is covertly hidden in the language of the cadets. O'Neill (1998) found that innuendoes or derogatory jokes are part of women's cadet experience on a daily basis. Gender nuances pervade the West Point vernacular; for example, the word *trou*, short for the word trousers, is slang for female cadet, especially when preceded by the adjective *gray*. Because of the 4,000-calorie-a-day carbohydrate intensive diet, women are often teased about the potential for expanding waistlines, leading to ill-fitting gray uniform pants (Gomstyn, 2006; Lipsky, 2004). Even still, the term is often used to describe any woman cadet, whether she is overweight or not (Gomstyn, 2006). Given the pressures of the military lifestyle, the weight and fitness standards, and mocking instances of language like that above, perhaps not surprisingly, researchers are recognizing the risk of women in the military to develop eating disorders (Lauder & Campbell, 2001; McNulty, 2001).

Preventative Policies

West Point has employed a number of preventative measures to ensure that its women cadets are unlikely to be targeted. The first classes of women in the late 1970s had window shades in their rooms, unlike their male neighbors. The shades

had been installed hastily after Academy officials realized during the first Beast Barracks that women cadets were visible through their windows at night. Although the shades afforded some privacy, they "had the unfortunate effect of identifying which rooms belonged to women to everyone passing by outside the barracks" (Janda, 2002, p. 135). The blessing-curse nature of the shades (which now adorn every barracks room) are but one example of a well-intentioned effort by the Academy that nevertheless garners resentment, making life harder for women cadets, although they never asked for the changes.

More recently, the issue has been a change in the door lock policy. In January 2006, USMA instituted a mandatory door-lock policy to protect cadets while they sleep (Bruno, 2006). West Point officials downplayed the decision, saying that it enhanced barracks security, and that the prevention of sexual assaults was not a main factor (Bruno, 2006). Although locks have been on doors for several decades, locking them has been voluntary. Cadets, however, usually would not lock doors, fearful they would be accused of mistrusting other cadets; women seeking approval in a male-dominated institution are not likely to commit such acts. The policy has generated considerable discussion amongst the ranks: some West Pointers feel that it diametrically opposes the values of duty, honor, and country, yet others see it as a necessary way to keep soldiers safe. Still others feel that it singles out the potential targets of sexual assault, women cadets, rather than addresses behaviors of the potential perpetrators.

Differences between Men and Women at the Academy

Women tend to graduate from the Academy at lower rates than men, the reasons for which are not entirely clear (Gomstyn, 2006; U. S. GAO, 2003a). Also, since women were admitted to USMA in 1976, proportionately more women than men cadets have left before graduating; data from the early 1990s revealed that many women were leaving during the sophomore year (U. S. GAO, 1994). Upon closer analysis of cadet experience, Academy officials realized that Cadet Field Training, held the summer before sophomore year, emphasized combat-related operations, areas from which women were excluded. Thus, they made slight modifications to the training as well as to labeling of certain aspects of that program to improve the training's perceived relevance to all cadets (U. S. GAO, 1994).

Research on the Class of 2002 (U. S. GAO, 2003a) does not show a significant difference in the academic and military grade point averages: women's grade point average was the same as the overall student population (2.99) and their military performance grade point average, taking into account all three pillars of achievement, was .02 lower. A study conducted in the mid-1990s revealed that women's grade point averages are generally lower in the first two years but are more similar to men's grade point averages in the junior and senior years (U. S. GAO, 1994). With respect to cadet leadership traits, Morgan (2004) found that there were few differences between men and women of the Class of 1998. In a study of 12 specific areas of leadership, the five dimensions that exhibited only slight differences were duty motivation ("actions that indicate persistence in the attempt to achieve high standards of performance for self, subordinates, and others" [Morgan, 2004, p.

2494]); influencing others ("appropriate interpersonal styles and methods in guiding individuals or groups toward task accomplishment or resolution of conflicts and disagreements" [Morgan, 2004, p. 2495]); professional ethics ("maintaining ethical, moral, and Army professional standards and values; and accepting and acknowledging full responsibility for one's actions and their consequences" [Morgan, 2004, p. 2495]); supervision ("the ability to establish procedures for monitoring and regulating processes, tasks, or activities of subordinates and one's own job; and taking actions to monitor the results of delegated tasks or projects" [Morgan, 2004, p. 2496]); and developing subordinates ("the art of developing the competence and self-confidence of subordinates through role modeling, training, and developmental activities related to their current or future duties" [Morgan, 2004, p. 2496]).

Franke (2000), in a survey designed to assess the impact of military socialization at USMA, found that a considerably lower proportion of female cadets displayed a potent military identity, suggesting "military socialization at USMA might be more effective in enhancing military identity images in male cadets than in their female counterparts" (p. 194). The survey, distributed to 31% of the Corps of Cadets, showed that although men and women of the Fourth Class (plebes) identified with the military at virtually the same rate, Third and Second Class male cadets were four times more likely than their female peers to view the military as important to their self-concept. Franke (2000) attributes the difference to the process of cadet socialization: during the second and third years, including summer exercises, the cadets train in highly competitive academic and physical program settings with emphasis on soldier skills and martial values. During their First Class

(senior) year, the odds for men and women cadets having a potent military identity nearly even out. Such observed differences between men and women cadets raises "the question of how effective West Point is in socializing female cadets for careers as commissioned officers, especially in light of recent incidents of gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the military" (Franke, 2000, p. 193).

The memories of Cadet Basic Training and its sophomore-year counterpart, Cadet Field Training, are long-lasting. Despite ethnographic findings that perceived strong social support makes for a major coping technique during the basic training experience (Gold, 2000), Francke (1997) insists that the reputation and level of harassment each woman cadet endured over her four years at West Point rested on those two summers of physical training, not overall academic achievement. She quotes one senior of the Class of 1992 as saying, "Your classmates look at you and remember, "Oh, that's the one who couldn't carry her rucksack" or "That's the one who couldn't carry the M-60" . . . It's sad that nothing else counts here but those two summers" (p. 198). Yet as Janda (2002) argues with respect to the early classes of women at West Point, the Academy makes "its tests both physical and mental; but, true to military tradition, physical prowess counted the most. Always. No vocation demanded more physically than the society of warriors" (p. 84).

Indeed, like the military generally, West Point demands that its cadets and Army personnel be in prime physical shape at all times, requiring feats such as the biannual rigorous physical fitness test. As Campbell (1995) notes, "physical activity often bonds groups of . . . cadets as they run together and share runners' pain and runners' high" (p. 3). Differing physical requirements for men and women at West

Point, however, have long been laced with controversy. Not mandated to do so by Congress, the Academy imposed different standards for men and women upon itself, anxious that women would not graduate if held to existing male standards (Janda, 2002). Yet male cadets have resented being accountable to different benchmarks of performance, even though, as Janda (2002) points out, "there was no thought to whether the standards themselves needed modification. Did upper body strength and running times really equate with combat prowess or leadership skill? Despite assumptions, no one really knew" (p. 41). On the USMA Admissions website, the Academy states that with the exception of a physical education course substitution, women "must meet the same standards as their male counterparts in academics, leadership and military development" (USMA Admissions, n.d.a). The exception is the self-defense course (combatives) women take during their first two years, when male cadets take boxing and wrestling. All cadets must take the Cadet Physical Fitness Test, based on standards of the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT). Using widely-respected physiological research, the Army's and the Academy's fitness tests use different standards for men and women for a 2-mile run, push-ups, and sit-ups. For example, to receive a perfect 100 on the 2-mile run, women can take 15 minutes, 36 seconds; men must run the distance in exactly thirteen minutes to receive the same score.

Finally, it is important to note that research has shown that women are more often charged with violation of the Honor Code (Pershing, 2001; U. S. GAO, 1994) at the service academies, but are less likely to be recommended for expulsion by the Superintendent. Pershing (2001) holds that women are not intentionally targeted,

but that their high visibility as tokens and lack of friendship networks increase their chances of being reported for alleged violations. Also of note, the number of women elected by their classmates as honor representatives has been disproportionately low (U. S. GAO, 1994).

Summary: Context

Arguably, the first-year experience at the United States Military Academy at West Point (USMA) is atypical of most institutions. Not only are cadets challenged to excel in the "three pillars of cadet life"—academic, military, and physical development—but also plebes are subject to extraordinary amounts of stress as they acclimate to an often-unfamiliar academic and military environment. In addition to regular classes and assignments, plebes endure daily duties like recitation of morning headlines, laundry delivery, and dining table duties in service to their upperclassmen. Women, as less than 20% of the student population, are required to meet the same standards as men, but do so at perhaps a higher risk of being singled out. Lingering difficulties from women's first integration into the Corps of Cadets in 1976, especially combat exclusion policies and incidents of sexual harassment and discrimination, hinder West Point's ability to create an educational environment that fully lives up to its mission. The Academy collects preadmissions data, academic and physical scores, and persistence rates of women cadets, but substantially less is known about the depth of their first-year experiences.

Conclusion

Identity and self-reflection are organically-related theoretical concepts. To support this claim, it is necessary to see self-reflection as a constructive meaning-

making function, its role to increase knowledge of the self within a dynamic community. Such a complex subject deserves additional empirical investigation within student development, a field in which educators have long pursued understanding as to what happens to students in postsecondary settings so that they may create appropriate interventions to enhance student learning and development.

Of course, very few, if any, entering cadet candidates in the United States Military Academy's Class of 2011 considered their upcoming transition so abstractly. Yet they have undergone a transition that simultaneously paralleled a normative transition to college yet diverged from it in distinctive ways. In this hypermasculine environment (Rosen et al., 2003; Yeager, 2007), the first few months at West Point deserve attention regarding if and how the transition to college sparks self-reflection as women acclimate to their new setting, for, as Hayes and Oppenheim (1997) espouse, the aim of education should be "expansion of the self as a meaning-making system" (p. 20).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore identity and self-reflection during the transition to college using a qualitative narrative design. As such, I examined the ways individual women students at West Point make meanings of their experiences in real time, while those experiences are happening. The intent was to show how their reflections and interpretations are essential to understanding and enhancing women's transition to the first year of college. This chapter explains the methodology of this research study, considering first the rationale for this study's qualitative approach and narrative design, with attention to the narrative research interview. I have also included a description of my role as a researcher, as is customary in qualitative studies. I explain the site and participant selection, ethical considerations, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and validity.

The Qualitative Research Paradigm

Qualitative research exhibits recognition that research should credit the views of study participants; ask broad, open questions; and better the lives of individuals (Creswell, 2005). Such research is applicable for educational problems that require exploration to garner a deep understanding (Creswell, 2005). With respect to qualitative inquiry within the field of student development, Pascarella remarks about its potential contribution:

[J]udicious and creative qualitative, naturalistic, or ethnographic approaches may simply be better and more sensitive ways of capturing many of the subtle and fine-grained complexities of college impact than more traditional quantitative approaches. (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 463)

Accordingly, I designed a qualitative study, as its focus is on the ways women students make sense of their transition to life at West Point—just before beginning Cadet Basic Training, during the first week of class, and several months later, after first semester final examinations.

Qualitative research is inductive; while the literature provides a backdrop, the real theory and meaning of this work are evolving as the data are collected and explored. Creswell (2003) argues that inductive research moves from gathering information, to forming themes and categories, to looking for broad patterns, and finally, to generalizing those patterns in juxtaposition to other existing theories and literature. As Casey (1992) has observed, "listening to [participants'] own interpretations of their experiences can result in the radical reconstruction of the researcher's own understanding of the problem" (p. 206). These scholarly viewpoints highlight how much qualitative inquiry requires openness and a tolerance for ambiguity as ideas and themes arise during the research process.

The Narrative Research Design

Narratives in Everyday Life

Narratives—stories— are ubiquitous. As Riessman (1993) argues, "presumably anything of an experiential nature is worthy of a lengthy account" (p. 56). McDrury and Alterio (2003) remark that

[s]torytelling is a uniquely human experience that enables us to convey through the language of words, aspects of ourselves and others, and the worlds, real or imagined, that we inhabit. Stories enable us to come to know these worlds and our place in them given that we are all, to some degree, constituted by stories: stories about ourselves, our families, friends and colleagues, our communities, our cultures, our place in history. (p. 31)

In much the same way that reflection helps one make meaning, so does the act of narrating. As Lodge (1990) puts forth, "narrative is one of the fundamental sense-making operations of the mind, and would appear to be both peculiar to and universal among human beings" (p. 4). Wells (1986) offers a congruent perspective:

Constructing stories in the mind—or storying as it has been called—is one of the most fundamental means of making meaning, as such, it is an activity that pervades all aspects of learning. When storying becomes overt and is given expression in word, the resulting stories are one of the most effective ways of making one's own interpretation of events and ideas available to others. (p. 194)

Narratives are valuable because they are discursive and interpretive (McDrury & Alterio, 2003), replete with all sorts of "stuff" that tells how people really live their lives by the words they choose and the images they convey (Casey, 1993). Collecting narratives emerged as the optimum method to understand identity development and self-reflection during the participants' transition to college.

Narrative Research

With roots in literary, historical, anthropological, sociological, psychological, and cultural studies (Casey, 1995), narrative research is a formalized examination in which "researchers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about these individuals' lives, and write narratives about their experiences" (Creswell, 2005, p. 53). Despite its inability to be classified into specific disciplines, the common

thread among narrative researchers is an interest in the ways that people make meaning through language. Narrative inquiry is a considerably postmodern strand of research, arising out of the social movements in the twentieth century, as a "celebration of ordinary people's heroism . . . [which] undermines the conservative glorification of great White men in the established autobiographical tradition" (Casey, 1995, p. 215).

Narrative research displays several major characteristics (Creswell, 2005). First, it considers experiences of an individual in chronological form. That is, social and personal interactions are cast in terms of past, present, and future. As Casey (1995) posits, "[t]he principal value of a narrative is that its information comes complete with evaluations, explanations, and theories and with selectivities, silence, and slippage that are intrinsic to its representations of reality" (p. 234). Also, from life histories or personal experience stories (Creswell, 2005) drawn from interview fieldwork, the researcher retells and develops a "re-story" in collaboration with the participants. Equally important is the incorporation of the context and place. While Creswell (2005) does not acknowledge the significance of the political within narrative, Apple (1993) offers "the context is set by the ideological conditions of the larger society" (p. xii). Hence, narrative researchers must be on the lookout for how storytellers are part of a distinct "cultural framework of meaning," structured by "particular patterns of inclusion, omission, and disparity" (Casey, 1995, p. 234). In this way, the narrative approach "illuminates the intersection of biology, history, and society" (Riessman, 2002, p. 697).

Newcomers to narrative research might dismiss its "minimalist formula" (Casey, 1993, p. 14), but, as Apple (1993) observes, narrative methodology is "deceptively simple, though grounded theoretically in quite a sophisticated way" (p. xiv). Participants are "not only creations of discourse but *makers* of discourse" (p. xv). Through this methodology, the researcher gives choice and power to the storytellers: they are the authors of their own stories, and may tell them however they desire. When participants' accounts are internally or externally inconsistent or include factual disparities, it does not mean that participants are unreliable. Instead, researchers believe that mismatches represent a source of insight about the contradictions between how participants tell their stories at a particular time and the circumstances surrounding their cultural standing (Casey, 1993).

Interviews in Narrative Research

The purpose of the narrative interview is to provide a participant "the possibility to narrate as extensively as necessary about his/her experiences" (Wengraf, 2001, p. 127). On the research interview spectrum, narrative interviews reside at an extreme end, principally because a participant's response is determined by a single question that asks for an extended telling of events (Wengraf, 2001). This type of question, referred to as the grand tour question by anthropologists (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972), is commonplace in interpretive interviews. Such design requires a researcher to give up control, for as long as possible, by resisting interrupting with further questions. In practice, this approach may look like: "I opened the interviews: 'Tell me the story of your life,' a challenge which I followed with silence," which,

according to Casey (1992), successfully elicited the "selectivities of the subjects themselves" (p. 17).

In language understandable to the participants, and therefore, often different from the research question(s), the interview question is more like an invitation to tell a story to a usually indifferent world. Wengraf (2001) explains the rationale for re-phrasing the question: "It is almost always harmful to couch informant questions in researcher language; informants have their own language which the interviewer must learn to be effective" (Wengraf, 2001, p. 67). Although a limitation of interviewing is that it provides indirect, filtered information from participants (Creswell, 2003), the goal of this research is not to reproduce events or outcomes. Instead, researchers and readers want to understand how storytellers make sense of what is occurring, how this perspective shapes their actions, and how they organize the oral presentation of themselves (Maxwell, 2005).

My Role as a Researcher

Like all forms of qualitative research, narrative research often discusses the researcher's subjectivity and the positioning of the researcher, topic, and participant (Casey, 1995; Creswell, 2003; Maxwell, 2005). Maxwell (2005) refers to this process as writing a "researcher identity memo" (p. 27); Peshkin (1988) refers to it as "taming subjectivity." I purposefully include this section so that I may examine assumptions, values, and experiences related to the research, qualities which "have the capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement" in an effort to "disclose to [my] readers where self and subject become

joined" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). In the narrative tradition, researchers are authentic, honest, and startlingly candid towards how they are entangled in the research process; remarkably, they do not seem to wish it to happen any other way (Casey, 1992; Nelson, 1983). They embrace subjectivity, reframing its nuances into occasions to relate to the lived experience of their participants. That is, emotional attachment does not necessarily preclude one's qualification for research pursuits.

Maxwell (2005) suggests considering personal goals—reasons I have been motivated to undertake this study—as a way of understanding my relationship to the research. In this case, my sustained interest in the first year of college, combined with equally compelling interests in women's issues and language, directed the formulation and implementation of this project's questions and methodology. If "you are what you study" (Kleinman & Copp, 1993, p. 6), my selections of topic and methodology reflected my own experiences as a woman as well as from formalized inquiry in women's studies and literature. Trailblazing women, real or fictitious, have always captivated me. If live on the periphery of our participants' experiences (Kleinman & Copp, 1993), I proceeded with caution during data analysis so that I would not overanalyze for instances of oppression nor overestimate their aspirations. I cannot say that a man conducting the same study would arrive at the same conclusions. For that matter, I cannot say that would arrive at the same conclusions in a different moment of my own life: "what I write today I should not write in a year's time," observes Virginia Woolf (1978, p. 75). Further, as "narrative research is a literary form of qualitative research with strong ties to literature" (Creswell, 2005, p. 474), my familiarity with literary analysis to guided me through the process.

Reading McDrury and Alterio (2003) reminded me of my dual role as educator and researcher. As I asked the women who participated in this study to tell their stories, I tacitly encouraged them to create spaces in which they could construct meaning, explore their current ways of doing things, validate their experiences, and if warranted, open the possibilities for change. I believe that storytelling is a tool in itself for learning. Yet as a researcher, I could not try to elicit my participants' reflective meaning-making processes, as I would, per se, if I were a first-year seminar instructor.

Finally, as it is accepted that "the military has a stake in how it is perceived" (Herbert, 1998, p. 132), while I currently lived within the gates of the West Point garrison community during the data collection phase of the project, the views expressed by my study do not represent the official policy of the United States Government, the Department of Defense, the United States Army, or the United States Military Academy, nor have I been employed by these organizations during the duration of the study. However, my status as a spouse of an Academy instructor increased my confidence, if not my ability, to navigate the channels that allowed me access to the cadets who became participants in this study. Through conversations with other scholars and my own observational experience of military issues, I recognized early in my pursuit of institutional approval that military officials were more likely to be receptive to my conducting research if my interests would not malign the Academy. Additionally, because my husband taught first-year students during the course of this study; thus, before the semester began, I ensured that none of my study's participants were in his courses to avoid a conflict of interest. I

conducted interviews in our home, two miles from the cadet barracks, and I conducted the transcription and analysis in our home office. To ensure my subjects' confidentiality from the outset, my spouse signed an agreement of confidentiality.

Site and Participant Selection

Site Selection

Selecting the United States Military Academy at West Point was intentional and purposeful. In order to understand self-reflection among women who are transitioning to a military academy, there are only a handful of locations across the country that fit such a description. In the more than 30 years since West Point admitted women, the Academy has been credited with relatively smooth gender integration (Diamond & Kimmel, 2002; Janda, 2002); however, such a stance paints the picture with broad strokes. Personal accounts are filled with much more texture. While the lives of women in the armed services continually garner interest from the political science and sociological arenas (Armor, 1996; Bourg & Segal, 2001; Francke, 1997; Herbert, 1998; Segal, 1999; Stanley & Segal, 1993; Steihm, 1982; Toktas, 2002), women at West Point are most often qualitatively examined in retrospective, as alumnae, rather than in real-time during their first year (for examples of retrospective studies, see Diamond & Kimmel, 2002; Janda, 2002; Morris, 1992). In addition, there are no published studies in scholarly (refereed) journals that use an authentic narrative design to study student development in any of the government-sponsored military academies with an all-military student population (i.e., United States Air Force Academy; United States Coast Guard

Academy; United States Merchant Marine Academy; United States Naval Academy; and Virginia Military Institute).

Of note, in the 1970s, the number of women in college kept pace with men; since 1979, women have outnumbered men at the undergraduate level (NCES, 2006). But, as it was in 1976 when the first class of women entered West Point, women are outnumbered at West Point, currently at a ratio approximately six to one. While on the whole higher education may have become accustomed to a preponderance of women in colleges and universities, West Point represents one of the few institutions in contemporary higher education where women are an underrepresented student group. Although they account for a small subset of the Corps of Cadets, their stories are just as worthy of study for the complexity they may contribute to our current understanding of their lived experiences.

"Gatekeepers" are the ancillary personnel in research settings who can facilitate or interfere with the study (Maxwell, 2005, p. 82). Just as Maxwell (2005) describes, gaining access to the setting involved more steps than I had anticipated. My research relationship with the institution began with the USMA Office of Policy, Planning, and Analysis. I submitted a research abstract, brief proposal, and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board approval to the chief of Institutional Research and Analysis, who presented my proposal to the Institutional Review Board at the Academy. Upon the Board's approval in November 2006, I began working with the executive officer of the USMA Office of Admissions to secure the names of admitted women for the Class of 2011. Such release of information necessitated additional authorization from the Office of the Staff Judge

Advocate General, which required that the Office of Admissions and I negotiate a gratuitous service agreement based upon my research design. Once the agreement was in place in May 2007, the Office of Admissions forwarded the study's initial interest email to incoming admitted women.

Participant Selection

Riessman (1993) emphasizes that in narrative design, sample sizes are small and usually unrepresentative. In narrative design, as the number of participants increases, the ability to support claims of detailed analysis decreases as the study becomes unwieldy (Creswell, 2005; Sandelowski, 1995; Wengraf, 2001), a reality that I took into consideration. I decided to use homogeneous sampling, where participants have membership in a subgroup with defining characteristics (Creswell, 2005). There were 225 women cadet candidates of the Class of 2011, who began matriculating during the summer of 2007. With the assistance of the USMA Office of Admissions, I contacted all of these students via email (included in Appendix A), asking for volunteers who were amenable to participate in a three-interview study that will involve a cumulative three to nine hours of their time, taking place prior to Reception Day (July 2, 2007), as well as willing to be interviewed after the first week of class (August 25-26, 2007) and again after final examinations (December 15-21, 2007). To collect this information, I created an Internet-based form (included in Appendix A) on a secure, proprietary site that captured interested participants' contact information and that easily delivered that information to me. I incurred only a nominal usage fee for use of this website. From the resulting 32 viable non-alphabetized list of interested respondents, I chose every 11th name (in homage to

their membership in the Class of 2011) until arriving at a sample size of six, in keeping with Morse's (1994) recommendation for research directed towards discerning the essence of people's experiences. Six respondents yielded 18 interviews over the course of the study. I contacted the selected participants via email to set up the initial interviews and contacted the non-selected participants via email to thank them for their interest and wish them well. Additionally, I allowed for attrition: if a participant decided to withdraw from the Academy, she could continue participating, as I believed her experience had contributable merit to the study. However, no participant resigned during the data collection phase of the project.

Ethical Considerations

Disclosure

My participants could have possibly seen me as someone "not wearing green" (not an officer), eliciting candidness and unlimited permission to speak freely without fear of retribution from chains of command. As someone not officially part of the institution, and also a woman, I sought to more honestly and vividly capture the participants' stories, as they might trust me as an empathetic listener. Even still, I was aware of Herbert's (1998) supposition that uniformed individuals who speak on issues of women and the military "must insure that no one thinks they are talking on behalf of the military . . . women, whether enlisted or officers, need to be assured that talking with a researcher will not be held against them" (p. 132). I stressed my non-affiliation and shared gender as attributes that should engender narrative, but participant disclosure and non-disclosure was not necessarily that simple.

Acknowledging that the participants could have revealed intricate, intimate details of their lives during the interview, I considered how they would feel after the interviews were completed. Edwards (1993) cautions that researchers consider the most extreme interviews, so that a respondent is not left with her "emotional life in pieces and no one to help put them back together" (p. 192). Foremost, I actively collaborated with the participants by debriefing participants after the interviews, letting them know that I will later provide them with transcripts of their respective interviews, subject to their review. Additionally, I familiarized myself with USMA cadet support resources and offices, in case a participant asked about where she may speak more about a particular subject beyond our interview.

Reporting Sexual Assault

Perhaps not surprisingly, in light of the history of sexual assault at military academies, USMA has developed a set of strict guidelines for sexual assault incident reporting, known as the Sexual Assault Response Policy (SARP). As I could have encountered situations in which the women participating in this project disclosed such an incident, I clarified my responsibilities with respect to SARP. According to the Special Assistant to the Commandant for Human Relations, for the purposes of this project, if any participant were to report an incident of sexual assault during an interview, I was obligated to report the incident to the Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC) or Victim Advocate (VA) in a "restricted channel" mode. The incident would be officially documented, and the victim of the sexual assault would be contacted with reporting options, but she would not be obligated to proceed with any further evidence collection (MAJ S. Breton, personal communication, February

6, 2007). The participants were assured of confidentiality by the process.

Additionally, I was advised to include a statement on the consent form stating the researcher's responsibility with regard to incident reporting, which I included on the Interview Protocol (see Appendix A).

Data Collection Strategies

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews from June, 2007 through December, 2007. I interviewed the incoming cadet candidates prior to R-Day (July 2, 2007), after the first week of class (August 25-26, 2007), and after final examinations (December 15-21, 2007). In keeping with narrative research's unstructured interview process, I asked a select number of open-ended questions, "intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants" (Creswell, 2003, p. 188). I used an interview protocol (included in Appendix A), containing a consent form, opening statements, the key interview questions, possible probes, space to document my own reflective notes (Creswell, 2003), and a place to document the narrator's preferred pseudonym. I included probe questions in case a participant's narration stalls (Riessman, 1993). I recorded the interviews using a digital audiorecorder, a "device to preserve the very sound of language . . . of how people *really* talk: their pauses, inflections, emphases, unfinished sentences, short periods" (Millett, 1971, p. 32); in other words, it registered the linguistic performance (Wengraf, 2001). As the audio-recorder captured the record of the interview experience, I made very few notes during the interview, focusing attention on employing active and supportive listening techniques (Wengraf, 2001). I used such applicable nonverbal, helpful

behaviors as good eye contact, occasional head nodding, facial animation, occasional smiling, physical proximity to interviewee, and relaxed open posture (Okun, 1997).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Preparing the Data

To ensure continuity among transcripts, I transcribed the audiorecorded interviews into single-spaced, line-numbered documents, similar to those in literature textbooks. The process of transcribing is not without its controversies; as Riessman (1993) observes, "seemingly mundane choices of what to include and how to arrange and display the text have serious implications for how a reader will understand the narrative" (p. 12). In the transcriptions, I made every attempt to record "silences, false starts, emphases, nonlexicals like 'uhm,' discourse markers like 'y'know' or 'so,' overlapping speech, and other signs of listener participation in the narrative" (Riessman, 1993, p. 12). As "there is no one, true representation of spoken language" (Riessman, 1993, p. 13), transcription involves selection and reduction.

Conducting Analyses

Riessman (1993) posits that analysis and transcription are not easily distinguishable, stating that

. . . [c]lose and repeated listenings, coupled with methodic transcribing, often leads to insights that in turn shape how we choose to represent an interview narrative in our text. As the research report is being prepared, there is also, of course, much more explicit reliance on preferred concepts and theories. (p. 60)

Similarly, Creswell (2003) offers that qualitative data analysis is

an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytic questions, and writing memos throughout the study. It is not sharply divided from the other activities in the process, such as collecting data or formulating research questions. (p. 190)

These perspectives reveal the recurrent nature of narrative analysis.

Narrative research analysis eschews dissection of text using grids and heuristics, as these devices sacrifice the pattern of the storytellers' priorities. In many ways, narrative analysis is about understanding the "whole" much the same way one interprets a poem. The traditional qualitative methods such as coding and arranging by themes tend to fragment and detrimentally compartmentalize the essence of participants' accounts (Casey, 1995). Coded subjects are impossible to write about separately; they are "hopelessly entangled" within the larger text and context (Casey, 1993, p. 27). Or, as Kleinman and Copp (1993) assert, "coding can become a crutch that keeps us from thinking in a holistic way about the data" (p. 24). The beauty of this type of research is that even when the researcher is as open as possible, even she can be surprised at the participants' resistance to traditional ways of labeling people or how "unexpected 'variables'" appear during the interviews (Kleinman & Copp, 1993, pp. 14-15).

Using Riessman's (1993) approach, I began the narrative analysis by asking such questions as "How is it organized? Why does an informant develop her tale this way in conversation with *this* listener?" (p. 61, emphasis in original). Moving further into analysis, I employed the traditional narrative research practice of "re-storying," in which I examine the narratives' devices such as actors, setting, plot, activities, climax, and denouement (Creswell, 2003). I looked for instances of repetition, which

perhaps demonstrated a participant's emphasis about certain parts of her story, and hesitation, which perhaps revealed possible struggles to voice certain parts of her story. Casey (1993, 1995) advises complementary tactics: identifying *selectivities*, the inclusions a participant chooses to share; *silences*, the gaps a participant chooses to leave out; *slippage*, the parts of the story that disagree; and *ruptures*, the parts of the story that seem to fall apart.

(Re-)Presentation

A narrative researcher must decide what parts of the texts deserve emphasis, how to assemble the texts for presentation, and what sets of assumptions underlie the analysis. The examination of the space between the narrator and the narrative is what linguists term *relational analysis*. What is most important is neither the context (the objective) nor the self (the subjective), but the relationship between them. Similarly, the focus is on "neither past nor present, but the relationship between them; neither dominant memory nor commonplace understandings, but the relationship between them; neither the personal/individual nor large-scale changes, but the relationship between them" (Casey, 1993, p. 12). In short, then, relational analysis is the search for evocative, semantic relationships within an ensemble of social relations. How much of the language that the participants use is open to interpretation? What metaphors do participants use and how can these metaphors be interpreted? What vocabulary choices do participants make, and what words have multiple meanings or convey ambiguity?

From the participants' narratives, the re-storying, and the relational analysis, I constructed a representation in the form of a report, drawing extensively

from direct quotations along with my commentary. This synthesis uses order, sequence, and reconstruction of time and place to provide a coherent structure of ideas (Creswell, 2005). I have commented on the differences, as well as similarities, of the narrators (Wengraf, 2001). Wengraf (2001) suggests this tale also serves as a "confessional narrative," tracing any of my controversies and struggles in matching theory and data (p. 362).

Validity

The validity of qualitative research suggests whether the findings are accurate from the perspective of participants, the researcher, or other readers (Creswell, 2003). Common issues in narrative research include distortion, fear of reprisal, or inability to express, all of which may affect how narrators construct their stories (Creswell, 2005). Riessman (1993), however, reminds us that stories are "truths of our experiences" (p. 22). Thus, any story told has an element of truth to it; "'trustworthiness' not 'truth' is a key semantic difference: The latter assumes an objective reality, whereas the former moves the process into the social world" (Riessman, 1993, p. 65). It follows that I have not attempted to verify the facts of these women's lives; instead, I considered their meanings of events within a particular place and time (Riessman, 2002). Personal perspective in and of itself is not bad; it simply indicates that wherever someone stands, she is able to see certain things and not others. A story is interesting not because it reproduces the past, but because it has been interpreted.

Creswell (2003) suggests several strategies which are applicable to this study to check the accuracy of qualitative research findings: member-checking; rich, thick

description; bias clarification; and negative and discrepant information. First, member-checking involves returning the interview transcripts back to the participants, so that they may decide if what they have said prior is accurate. Riessman (1993) also supports this practice as part of ensuring trustworthiness: "It is important that we find out what participants think of our work, and their responses can often be a source of theoretical insight" (p. 66). After each interview series was complete, I emailed each participant a copy of her transcript and invited comments and revisions. Second, I conveyed the findings using rich, thick description, especially as it concerns the study setting, beginning in Chapter II, with a detailed contextual setting so that readers unfamiliar with military academy life have a portrait of the setting. This description continues in Appendix B, a photographic essay which highlights West Point women's lives. Third, in this chapter, I attempted to clarify my subjectivity that I bring to the project, a reflexive process which I intend contributes to an open, honest discussion. Fourth, if any information arises in a participant's narrative that is incongruent with other information she or another participant has provided or that in some way is unfavorable, I have presented it, even if such data contradict themes. As Creswell (2003) notes, "real life is composed of different perspectives that do not always coalesce" (p. 196).

Additionally, my contribution to "objectivity" has been a willingness to stand back, look, and listen to the unfolding of the personal accounts, displayed by use of extensive participant quotes using the precise language of participants (Creswell, 2005). I tried to reciprocate my storytellers' generosity by providing them a

comfortable place and refreshments when they were interviewed. It is not uncommon for first-year cadets to visit homes within the West Point garrison community; plebes have sponsors, current USMA faculty members and their spouses, who invite students to their homes on weekends for casual get-togethers featuring home-cooked food, in contrast to the spartan surroundings and mass-produced meals they receive on a regular basis. Although my family did not officially sponsor any of my study participants, I replicated this environment in the hope that they were as relaxed as possible.

Summary of Methodology

Beginning with a discussion of qualitative inquiry and narrative design, this chapter has explored the unstructured nature of narrative interviews and issues related to conducting narrative data collection and analysis. A reflection about my role as a researcher has made me more aware of the ways in which my personal qualities are intertwined with my subject. I have included specific information with respect to the site and participant selection, data collection strategies, ethical issues, analysis and interpretation, and the creation of the final presentation. To ensure validity and trustworthiness in this study, I plan on using member checks, thick description, appraisal of myself in the final presentation, and inclusion of contradictory findings.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore identity and self-reflection during the transition to college using a qualitative narrative design. As such, I examined the ways individual women students at West Point make meanings of their experiences in real time, while those experiences are happening. The intent was to show how their reflections and interpretations are essential to understanding and enhancing women's transition to the first year of college. This chapter presents the first-hand accounts of the women cadets, accompanied by narrative analysis and study findings. I begin with a discussion of the interview process and a description of the participants, followed by a discussion of how the stories coalesce as an episodic female *bildungsroman*, a "novel of formation" (Hirsch, 1979, p. 293), with five motifs: family legacy, carrying, plebeian, self and other, and reflection. Finally, I discuss elements of discourse, in which I present findings from an examination of the narratives for distinct vocabulary usage and other salient linguistic features.

Interviews and Participants

In late May 2007, the USMA Department of Admissions forwarded the interest email I had composed to 222 of the eventual 225 incoming women cadet candidates in the Class of 2011. The email directed interested participants to a website, from which I gathered contact information as outlined in Chapter III. From 40 hits on the site, there were 32 viable participants (eight would not be 18 by the

time the study began). I shuffled the remaining responses and then chose every eleventh name on the list. Once I had six names, I contacted the participants via email and followed up a few days later with a telephone call. All six of the women whose names I had selected expressed interest in continuing with the study. Based upon their travel schedules, we set up initial interview times from June 29 through July 1, 2007, the weekend prior to Reception Day (R-Day), Monday, July 2, 2007. As per the interview protocol (see Appendix A), at the beginning of the session, I asked each participant to tell me the story of her life, probing further with inquiries such as "tell me more about . . ." or "what was that like?" when she stalled.

Second interviews took place August 24 through August 26, 2007, the weekend just after the first week of classes. As I learned, the annual Plebe Retreat also took place that weekend, which several of the participants had attended, the first opportunity in weeks to have "all day to ourselves" (Joy, Interview 2, August 26, 2007). I opened these interviews with an invitation to "bring me up to date on the story of your life." Third interviews occurred December 15 through December 19, 2007, during the week of Term End (final) exams, also known as TEEs. I gave each participant latitude to decide at what point during that week she felt most comfortable to conduct the interview. Again, I prompted each participant to bring me up to date on her story; I also asked each to tell me how she envisioned herself 20 years from now (similar to the question asked by Belenky et al., 1997, p. 50), in an effort to understand how she saw her life unfolding. All interviews but one took place in my home. The exception was one participant's first interview because she arrived later than she had anticipated and due to personal obligations, was not able

to come to the campus the night before Reception Day. Therefore, I met her at her hotel and we conducted the interview in a quiet space in the lobby. At the conclusion of each interview, I made written notes and observations.

Also, to maintain the confidentiality of the participants, I asked them to choose pseudonyms, several of whom shared their reasons why they chose a particular name. I have attempted to conceal the name of their hometowns and USMA company affiliations; however, given that the uniqueness of some facets of their stories, the identities of the cadets may be obvious to readers familiar with the USMA Class of 2011.

These six young women were among an entering class of 1,305 cadet candidates (S. Sabel, personal communication, January 23, 2008), selected from a pool of more than 10,800 applicants (USMA Public Affairs Office, 2007). Notably, they are also members of the largest class of women to enter West Point to date, comprising 17% of the class. As a cohort, they are 2007 high school graduates, with the exception of one who graduated in 2006. Born in 1988 or 1989, these young women were 12 or 13 on September 11, 2001. Five are white; one is Korean-American. Also, all six participants completed Cadet Basic Training (CBT) and fall semester 2007. Prior to discussion of their narratives, brief background descriptions of each participant, constructed from the stories they told me, are provided below. I have listed them in the order in which I met these young women.

Kristen

Kristen was born and raised in an affluent area less than an hour from the West Point gates. The middle of three sisters, she attended local public schools while

both of her parents worked full-time. At age 3, she began ballet, persisted through a middle school period of boredom, until she could enjoy the exclusivity of dancing en pointe. Kristen describes the end of her dancing career as abrupt, deciding to quit during her senior year of high school when she overheard a fellow student and a teacher bemoaning how big they felt after lunch. Due to her mother's work as a psychologist, red lights went off, and Kristen no longer wanted to be in an environment in which eating disorders were potentially prevalent. Attributing her interest in military academy education to both grandfathers' service in the Army during World War II, Kristen began the USMA application process during her junior year of high school, without her parents' knowledge. Although they agreed to her participation in the USMA Summer Leaders Seminar (SLS) during 2006, her parents believed her interest in the military would wane; on the contrary, her experiences and selection as assistant squad leader during SLS only strengthened her resolve to continue the admissions process. In November 2006, Kristen attended the congressional interview required to receive nomination to the Academy without her parents' knowledge, telling her mother, "I'm going to return movies to Blockbuster." She waited until she turned 18 before getting the physical examination so she could do it without parental consent; when her doctor found a faint heart murmur that required a specialist's echocardiogram, she drove out-of-state, alone, to have the procedure done. Once the specialist established that the murmur was not serious, she said, "I *knew* that I would be getting the appointment and . . . I was like, 'Okay, I really have to tell my parents now'" (Kristen, Interview 1, June 29, 2007).

Jodie

Jodie hails from a military family; her father is a USMA alum and spent nearly thirty years as an officer in the Army. Growing up, she and her younger brother lived in Germany, North Carolina, and Kansas, among other places. Upon her father's retirement in 2000, Jodie's family settled in a mid-Atlantic region with access to multiple military installations. Jodie was the only one of the six participants who mentioned the terrorist events of September 11, 2001, which occurred when she was 13 years old, saying, "West Point was already in the back of my mind, the military was already in the back of my mind, but then after that, it was kind of like, 'okay, I'll think about this a little bit more seriously'" (Jodie, Interview 1, July 1, 2007). By her senior year of high school, she applied to USMA but was initially declined admission, and instead was encouraged to attend a preparatory program at a two-year military school in the southern United States. As she was away from home, had a car and a cellular phone, and was taking college-level courses, she considers her year at the preparatory school her first college experience.

Joy

Like Jodie, Joy is also from a military family and frequently moved while she was growing up, although she had never set foot on the West Point grounds until two days prior to Reception Day. Her father, a chaplain in the United States Army, but who did not attend USMA, accompanied Joy on the trip to drop her off, and the pair spent time touring the Cadet Chapel. Joy has a younger brother who already is thinking of coming to USMA. She joined her school's JROTC program in the ninth

grade, participating in an intensive leadership academy, which required her to get to school by 5:00 a.m. each day. She persisted, although she noticed a lot of others drop out, to prove to herself that she was capable of a military work ethic. She became interested in West Point at the end of her junior year, but was slow to begin application until her mother "got on" her to do it. Her high school "had a tradition of sending a lot of people to the academies" (Joy, Interview 1, July 1, 2007) and thus her JROTC instructor, a United States Naval Academy graduate, was familiar with the admissions process and offered his assistance.

Kelly

Kelly is from the southwestern United States. She chose her pseudonym, in part, out of consideration for me, because it was a "short" name and would be easy to replicate in my text. Her parents divorced when she was a toddler, and her mother moved her and her younger sister to her current hometown to be closer to her maternal grandparents and other relatives. As a child, Kelly's grandparents took her to national parks and battlegrounds, sparking an appreciation for American history and culture. She first considered USMA in 2003, during her ninth grade year, but was initially dissuaded by a high school counselor whose son had attended USMA and told her that USMA and ROTC programs were not places for girls. Kelly boasts an all-star resume: by high school graduation, she had been the school student body president; valedictorian; homecoming queen; prom queen; president of her high school chapter of Teenage Republicans; a participant in the National Student Leadership Conference, during which she and a young Marine laid the wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier; and one of two students selected from her state to

attend the United States Senate Youth program, during which she met the President, Chief Justice, and high-ranking leaders at the Pentagon. The latter two of these experiences took her to Washington, D.C., a place she describes as "renewing," helping to reaffirm her ardor to attend USMA. Despite her guidance counselor's prior discouragement, she discovered and applied to the Summer Leaders Seminar (SLS) on her own; her attendance during 2006 laid the groundwork for her admission to the Class of 2011.

Michelle

Michelle is from the southern coast of the United States. She is an only child; growing up, her family spent half of each year living on an island, where she attended a very small school with less than ten students per class. A softball player since age 8, she first learned of West Point at a tournament during her sophomore year in high school. She first visited West Point during that same spring, reportedly "loving it." In addition to Michelle, two other students from her small Catholic high school were accepted to service academies; the unusual situation warranted an article in the local newspaper. Like Kristen and Kelly, she attended the Summer Leaders Seminar in 2006. At the outset of basic training, Michelle planned to try out for Corps Squad (varsity) softball; when she made the team, she then had to try out for her position, a competition she had not faced before. In the interest of full disclosure, less than a month after our final interview, I received an email from Michelle, in which she relayed she was resigning from the Academy: "I struggled last semester and stuck it out—it was a great experience, but not exactly my cup of tea."

Alejandra

Whereas the other interviews proceeded according to schedule, Alejandra unexpectedly did not arrive in the area until late in the evening on July 1, 12 hours before she reported to Reception Day, and was not going to be able to attend our session on post as planned. Consequently, I met her in the lobby of the hotel where she was staying, and we found a quiet corner to conduct the interview. Alejandra, whose voice on the telephone was polite yet diffident, was anything but reserved once she began her life story. Although her pseudonym is a Spanish name, she herself is not, and chose *Alejandra* because of her affinity for the Spanish culture, fluency in the Spanish language, and participation in a Hispanic community in her rural southern hometown. In the ninth grade, she joined her school's JROTC program over the next few years, participated on the drill, physical training, color guard, and rifle teams. By the tenth grade, because she felt at home in the JROTC program, she had begun considering a military academy for college; at that point, was on track to be the valedictorian of her class. Yet the sudden death of her father during her junior year disrupted her life, and her grades plummeted. With the help of JROTC leadership, a major and a sergeant major, she rebounded during her senior year, becoming the unit's commander and working every day after school to increase her chances of a USMA offer of admission. Alejandra has an older brother, who has been in the military as long as she can remember, and a younger brother who still is in high school. Her mother has been a bartender for many years. Of note, Alejandra kept a journal during basic training, about which she said in our second interview, "Keeping a journal wasn't that hard. But I was just so tired at night, I

was like, I'm going to write, and then I'd wake up with a journal under my mouth" (Alejandra, Interview 2, August 26, 2007). She brought the journal to her second interview, re-reading some of the pages as a reminder of the past eight weeks.

Data Analysis

Formation of the Episodic Female Bildungsroman

As I completed each set of interviews and immersed myself in the transcription process, I frankly contemplated how I was going to be able to make sense of these seemingly disparate texts. The thousands of words representing my data seemed overwhelmingly loose and to a certain degree, adolescently pedestrian. How many times had the word "cool" been applied to describe a teacher, an experience, or a group's disposition? To simply conclude that my research revealed that these young women think their initial college experience is "cool" would be tragically insufficient. Similarly, while I have been concerned with a potential "chilly climate" on campus, for them, being in a situation they could describe as "chill" was a very good thing, an amusing example of the multifaceted nature of one common vocabulary.

Yet, as the saying attributed to Virginia Woolf goes, "arrange whatever pieces come your way," so I continued to work with the data. As I began re-storying the narratives and framing them using traditional literary devices, a collective focal point surfaced. I began thinking of each narrator as the lead character—the protagonist—within her own story. Thus distilled, the conflict inherent in each protagonist's story is: how will she persevere the first six months of life as a cadet? The temporal nature of the study, the tracing of these cadets from pre-Reception

Day to the end of the first semester, is reminiscent of the archetypal plot of the *bildungsroman*, a novel of a young person's development over time, portraying a "process of becoming" (Hirsch, 1979, p. 305). Additionally, a *bildungsroman* includes elements such as childhood, generational conflict, larger society, and education, although the latter does not usually occur in a traditional instructional setting. Recollections of the past are important to the development of the present. The protagonist decides after "soul-searching, which sort of accommodation to the world he can honestly make, he has left his adolescence behind and entered upon his maturity. His initiation complete, he may then visit his old home, to demonstrate by his presence the degree of his success" (Buckley, 1974, p. 18). The protagonist leaves home, and henceforth either integrates or fails in a new, unfamiliar, and often unforgiving setting. In this present research, Alejandra, for example, often envisions herself returning to her hometown:

I think twenty years from now, on my twentieth, umm, reunion in high school, if we ever had one, I'd be like, yeah, [sigh], so I'm a major in the Army and [sigh], I make about a hundred thousand a year, [laugh] what are you doing, oh, you, uhh, work in a restaurant, how nice, [laugh], no, I wouldn't do that, it'd be so mean. (Alejandra, Interview 3, December 17, 2007)

Although her interjected laughs and her final statement indicate that she recognizes such behavior would be socially taboo, foreseeing eventual success in the denouement of her life story sustains her over the first six months. Likewise, after this last interview as I drove her back to the barracks, she proudly informed me of her plans later that week to return to her high school JROTC classroom in her cadet uniform. She very much wants to make a favorable impression of her progress since

beginning her college experience. Even at the end of the first semester, her expectations for her future through West Point are still high, despite an acknowledged ongoing battle with procrastination and turmoil in her relationship with a boyfriend back at home. Echoing the enthusiasm during the first arrival phase of the Menninger Morale Curve, Alejandra's optimism may suggest that the transition period has not ended six months into the college experience.

Frequently, the subject of the *bildungsroman* is fatherless or has been rejected by a father. According to Buckley (1974), "the loss of the father, either by death or alienation, usually symbolizes or parallels a loss of faith in the values of the hero's home and family and leads inevitably to the search for a substitute parent or creed" (p. 19). Such a loss is the impetus for development as the protagonist struggles to define identity. In the present study, Alejandra's father died when she was sixteen years old, prompting her to find surrogates, her JROTC instructors, who she refers to as "like my fathers" (Alejandra, Interview 1, July 1, 2007; Interview 3, December 17, 2007). Similarly, Kelly has lost her father to divorce:

... Certain things in my life that, umm, taught me a lot about like personal strength and like, especially dealing with my dad [inflection high] because he is someone who we don't, umm, he's been kinda hurtful to our family and I don't consider him my dad, uhh, at all. And I see him now once, about once every couple years for just a meal, umm, and I don't keep in touch with him. (Kelly, Interview 1, June 30, 2007)

The absence of a central male authority figure is also common to the women referred to as subjective knowers, studied in the work of Belenky et al. (1997), as I came to understand Kelly, among others in this study, to be. Kelly, as the passage above reveals, is apathetic towards her father. Although her father is cast off, Kelly does

find a replacement in her grandfather, who accordingly serves as one of the principal actors throughout her story. Both Kristen and Michelle, although they have fathers who live at home, leave their fathers virtually out of their narratives, mentioning them only in passing. In fact, Kristen's father, when it came down to "crunch time" to make the decision to attend West Point, is not even physically present:

I found out that I got in, in like mid-May, and I had to decide if I was coming in within 72 hours. So I just sat at home with my mom like all morning, and I was like, I don't know what to do. . . . so I had like three days and so, that was like the most tense part. Umm, and my dad was away, so he left this whole like letter for me like, "before you make your decision, read this."
(Kristen, Interview 1, June 29, 2007)

Joy and Jodie, daughters of fathers in the military, emphasize that the decision to attend the military academy was theirs alone. Aware of a perception that military kids often attend military schools because of an overbearing parent, Jodie, in specific detail, describes her father's involvement in the decision to attend:

My dad, he of course, has helped me a lot just by telling me exactly what I probably will expect, just to expect, what to expect and, he umm, he really, uhh, he supports me. He of course didn't want to feel, he didn't want me to feel like I was pre—like I was being pressured to come here, so he asked me a couple times, y'know, if you decide you don't want to do this, that's fine, y'know, don't feel like because I went there and you, you need to go there. . . . So, I mean, it wasn't that I didn't have other options; he's like, you have other options, don't worry about it. And it was really, it came down to where do I want to go to school and that was here. (Jodie, Interview 1, July 1, 2007)

In this declaration, Jodie defines a separate identity from her father, dissociating how a childhood of fond memories on military installations and a father in uniform might have contributed to her decision. That her father appears this way in her retelling demonstrates Jodie's resolve to see herself as her own person.

The classic, canonical *bildungsroman* has as its hero a young man, whom literary critics evaluate according to the individualizing tendency (Fraiman, 1993) of Western culture. Successful entry into an adult community is dependent upon his separation, autonomy, competition, and hierarchical rights (Hovet, 1990). When George Eliot first published *The Mill on the Floss* in 1860, she created Maggie Tulliver as its central character, who, since the advent of feminist literary criticism in the twentieth century, has become the quintessential figure in the female *bildungsroman*. A novel written by a woman, the female *bildungsroman* is most often about the personal development of a heroine, with parallels to a male *bildungsroman*, but, as the flurry of scholarly literature on the subject attests, diverges from the male hero in significant ways. According to Braendlin (1983), novels written by women affirm the "personal and social goals, values, and ideals that many male authors have renounced," and they recognize the "importance to female self-development of human values such as familial and marital love, communal sharing, and the perpetuation of cultural mores" (p. 86). As female protagonists do not easily sever family ties nor abandon care for others, the crux of their accommodation to society is the negotiation of care of self with responsibility to others (Hovet, 1990). Comparable to these interpretations of female *bildungsroman*, the women's narratives from this study demonstrate portraits of students developing relational identities with others and connectedness to their institution.

A *bildungsroman* is "not a full biography" (Hirsch, 1979, p. 298), but a work in which "fact and fiction are inextricably mingled" (Buckley, 1974, p. 24). While I never purported I would be able to know the complete, verifiable story of the young

women who participated in my study, these loosely connected incidents were more than miscellany, capable of broader motifs. In this sense, what had seemed fragmented events, I rethought the narratives as having an episodic structure. The characters in episodic novels are distinct, linked by common themes. Re-shaped, these stories of six protagonists yielded five motifs: family legacy, carrying, plebeian, self and other, and reflection.

The Family Legacy Motif

One of the central questions guiding this research was how do women cadet candidates make meaning of the decision to attend West Point? In our initial interviews, when I asked them to tell me the story of their lives, most participants opened by telling me about their hometowns, whether or not they had siblings, and what their parents did for a living, before switching gears to talk about West Point. Kelly, however, frames her story in terms of influential events, beginning:

[W]ell, the main thing that has really impacted my life and probably helped guide where I've gone is that my mom and my dad were divorced when I was age three, and so it's been my mom, my sister and I for all that time, three girls in our house. (Kelly, Interview 1, June 30, 2007)

True to this pattern, throughout the rest of her stories, she casts many events and decisions in light of how her family, particularly her mother, reacted:

I smoked my first cigar and stuff on Christmas dinner 'cause, you know, they're all just traditions that you follow and my mom was kinda shocked 'cause I showed her the pictures from dinner, I'm like, look mom, [laugh] she's like oh my gosh, I can't believe my little girl's smoking a cigar, and it's just, oh, and my grandpa of course was like the opposite side of the spectrum, ahh, let her do it, it's good tradition, you know [laugh]. (Kelly, Interview 3, December 15, 2007)

Throughout the course of the interviews, Kelly talks about her experiences as personally significant events and turning points, conveying a sense of continuity, even describing the contrasting opinions of her mother and grandfather on a "spectrum" in the passage above. Her arrival on the Academy grounds for Reception Day is deliberately part of her journey. Many of the other texts, however, came across as "bits and pieces," such as when Michelle says, "My mom bought me, for the road trip, an Etch-a-Sketch, so I played with that a lot, I was sketching things along the way. I don't know why I'm telling you that" (Michelle, Interview 1, June 30, 2007).

After relaying basic biographic information, the narrators move into a discussion of how their interest in West Point originated. Five cite relatives who had served in the military. Alejandra remarks:

And then my older brother, who's, uhh, 29 now, he was in the military, and he was stationed in Germany. He went active because he didn't like college at first and wanted to wait and go to college later. So, umm, through that, my grandfathers, both of them, and all my uncles, everyone that's a male in the, uhh, in the family has been in the military, except for my dad; he never went, he's the only male [laugh]. But umm, due to my brother I wanted to go to JROTC, so I signed up for that in ninth grade and umm, I did well, uhh, academically and physically. (Alejandra, Interview 1, July 1, 2007)

Jodie, whose father retired from the Army, describes what it was like growing up in a military community:

It was a really neat experience, and that's what I, I kind of liked about the whole military environment. Just the, I saw people, like as a little kid I would see them running in formation, doing PT, and stuff, and I thought that was really neat as a little kid. I was like, "wow, that's so cool." You know, you could hear them singing cadences, and I just like the fact that everybody was so close with one another, and it was the camaraderie, I was like, well, you

can't really get a lot of that in the corporate environment sometimes. So, you know, when I got a little older, I was like, I can't think of anything else I really want to do, except the military. (Jodie, Interview 1, July 1, 2007)

Joy is less elaborative: "my dad's in the Army, so we move around a lot, so I, I kind of like always knew that I was gonna go in the military [inflection rising]. Umm, just like the life, I like it" (Joy, Interview 1, July 1, 2007). Kelly gleaned her interest from her grandfather, who had served as a noncommissioned officer:

My grandpa had always kinda tried to, like, drop hints about how great the military was to my boy cousins [inflection rising], umm, and I guess he didn't realize I was listening [laugh], 'cause I was the one who actually did the research and the finding out more about it and they never did. (Kelly, Interview 1, June 30, 2007)

Both of Kristen's grandfathers served in the military; her paternal grandfather was part of European forces during World War II. Although she was young when he died, she remembers:

In the attic of my grandmother's house like they had all his like trunks with like his stuff and on my dad's side, like he's Jewish, so like serving in Europe and like all of the Nazis and everything like meant like a lot to him, that he was able to kind of like help people from the Holocaust so he had like a lot of stuff. Like he had some, like, Nazi, like, he had, like a knife and stuff that, like, he had taken. And like a lot of pictures. (Kristen, Interview 1, June 29, 2007)

Although her language is somewhat awkward, the image of a young girl rustling through an old trunk full of war mementos and photographs is not only poignant, but also serves to connect this young woman's family history with her present decisions.

Thus, in telling of ancestral connections to the military, each participant conveys a sense of family legacy, as if history justifies their postsecondary selection. Calling West Point the "best route" (Alejandra, Interview 1, July 1, 2007) to combine a professed love of the military, a certain career in leadership, and academic forte, these heroines explain themselves nonetheless by family tradition. It may be unusual that a woman continues the tradition, as in Kelly's case, or that parents vehemently disagree with the decision, as in Kristen's case. But, like many college-bound high school seniors remark they always knew they were going to college, these women explain the choice of West Point as inerrant and predictable.

The Carrying Motif

Touchables. These young women bring with them more than the carrying on of family legacy. The tangible items, many of them recommended by USMA on a list sent out before Reception Day, is reminiscent of O'Brien (1990) of his platoon in Vietnam, "the things they carried were largely determined by necessity" (p. 2). Yet from their narratives, the protagonists struggled to decide if they should bring exactly what is on the list, or more, or less. Jodie recalls how last year's experience at preparatory school informed what few items she carries with her this year:

I brought a lot with me. . . . Everybody brought a lot, because [the school] didn't tell you what to bring. . . . it wasn't like West Point where they provided you with towels and the sheets. They didn't provide you with any of that, so we had to bring a lot of your stuff and computers, so I, it was kind of like a college experience in the sense that we did pack up the car and we were driving cross-country with all my stuff loaded in the back but, umm, but then it was kind of like where do I put it all? 'Cause you had to have everything, y'know, in a specific place, like you do here, so it was, it was interesting trying to put all of the civilian clothes everywhere, 'cause we could go out on weekends, which was different than here and umm, so hiding all of the civilian clothes and then of course, by the end of the year, just accumulating a

whole bunch of stuff, umm, it got harder and harder trying to stuff everything [laugh] and hide it away. Uhh, but this, this year, I'm putting underwear and bras in a Ziploc bag [laugh], and some toothpaste and some shampoo and that's pretty much it, my low quarters and my combat boots in a duffel. (Jodie, Interview 1, July 1, 2007)

Contrast Jodie to Alejandra, who describes:

My bag's pretty big. But the thing is, I didn't pack that much more than what everyone else did, it's just the boots and the shoes, I already bought ahead of time, so that's taking up a lot of my bag space, umm. But I wanted to be extremely prepared, because everyone else, they were telling me, oh, all they brought was their boots and umm, their toothbrush, and that's all they brought with them. But I want to be extremely prepared, so I brought everything they suggested bring: my alarm clock, a wristwatch, a, some shampoo, and some of this and some of that, and so I got my baggies and everything, I got everything nice and neat and everything, uhh, but it's a lot of stuff, so. We might go to Wal-Mart, I think, after the interview, to get some more stuff. But I'm gonna be extremely [accented word] prepared. And that's all I gotta to say. Everyone else is gonna be like, oh, I'm all sweaty and hot, and I'm gonna be like, I got a wet wipe, so ha ha. In your face. And they're gonna be wanting to borrow my stuff, and ha. But I'm gonna be a team player and I'm gonna let them borrow it, of course. And I'll probably run out after the first week, I know it, but I just want you to know that my first week was comfortable [accented word], while I had those things. We'll see. (Alejandra, Interview 1, July 1, 2007)

These material items are more than just supplies to make life bearable; they also represent an infusion of each woman's "exterior" life that she brings into her West Point barracks. Because cadets are limited in what they can have, matter matters to them. Reception Day joins the personal with the institutional, as new cadet candidates carry even more once issued military supplies. Jodie remembers Reception Day:

And most of it is just, it was just issue point after issue point after issue point and it was pretty miserable. I remember it because it was miserable 'cause we had to wear our flight bags. And the flight bag probably weighed up to 75

pounds, and we were just standing around with it on for probably three or four hours and so the one thing that I'm probably going to remember for the rest of my life is how heavy that flight bag was and having to stand with it like this, walk around with it, hunched over. (Jodie, Interview 2, August 24, 2007)

Once the dust settles from Cadet Basic Training, these narrators turn their attention on one particular material good: their personal clothes. After the initial Reception Day activities, these women changed out of civilian clothes (*civvies* in West Point vernacular) and donned one of several issued military uniforms; they would be uniformed until they could leave during Labor Day weekend, over eight weeks later. As one narrator before that holiday weekend says, "I get to wear civilian clothes next weekend, that's why I'm excited, too. Actual shoes" (Michelle, Interview 2, August 26, 2007). Perhaps not surprisingly, then, one participant requested I take her to the Post Exchange (PX) after our second interview so that she could purchase a civilian shirt for the upcoming weekend.

Civilian clothes represent individuality cadets must suppress to be part of the institution. As Jodie's preceding description from her preparatory school experience illustrates, "stuff" not only has to have a place, it often must disappear, as in the case of civilian clothes, which cannot be stored in the dressers and wardrobes in cadet rooms that are dedicated solely to uniforms. Having clothing as a particular choice of expression meant so much to them that by the third interviews, opportunities to wear civvies figured prominently in the descriptions of social settings. For instance, in our last interview, one cadet comments on a cadet holiday party held the previous weekend: "We were allowed to wear civvies, so that was like, the bait for us to come and you pretty much go to any lengths to wear your civilian

clothes whenever you can" (Joy, Interview 3, December 17, 2007). Another, of her travels with a club sport team, says, "I enjoy the team, a lot because it's a fun sport and umm, the tournaments are always fun and we can wear civilian clothing," emphasizing the last phrase with ornamental applause (Alejandra, Interview 3, December 17, 2007).

For Kelly, remembering her sojourn to New York City over Labor Day weekend, her uniform takes on new meaning as she felt perceived differently when wearing civilian clothes:

. . . It was crazy just to put on civilian clothes. That's for sure. Like, everyone, it's really funny, but you can always see the kids changing on the ferry, on their way there, there's the kids changing like on the train, there's the kids in the bathrooms like right outside post, 'cause you know, you're supposed to leave in the uniform, but then it's kind of gray area beyond that. And so I put on my civilian clothes for the first time and I was just, I was almost uncomfortable for just a second because, I mean, this is actually an interesting thing that I thought of, and it pertains to just females in general as cadets. Like I feel like cadets, females, get a lot of respect from their male counterparts. And I think it's, I don't know if it's necessarily universal, but I feel like we're respected more as individuals and less as maybe like [sigh], for the way we look. Because I think that there's always going to be the people in your company like, the guys in your company, you're like a sister to, and you're not something like they're looking at as an object of attraction, and so it's weird to put on civilian clothes and have boys look at you in that way, like maybe like some type of sex object or something like that. It was actually really uncomfortable for me because I was, like I felt guys looking at me differently when I was wearing civilian clothes and when they look at me when I'm wearing a uniform. And [laugh] I'm much more comfortable with the way when I'm wearing a uniform. (Kelly, Interview 3, December 15, 2007)

A uniform is safe. Expectations and boundaries are clear; recognition is unavoidable. Yet it is also restrictive, and the opportunity to shed that institutional identity is the highlight of weekends away from the post. Kelly would nearly sacrifice slipping on her favorite shirt to remain perceived as a loyal and valued member of the unit,

suppressing femininity as if it were hazardous to her cadet identity. Also interesting is her unintentional color pun: "you're supposed to leave in the uniform, but then it's kind of a gray area beyond that." Just as the standard uniform a plebe must leave in is gray, the place where he or she can change out of that uniform is also gray.

Metaphorically, such a statement raises the question that even out of uniform, can a cadet ever escape an institutional identity that comes replete with high standards and expectations of manner and act? That is, is a cadet ever not a cadet? Kelly herself offers her answer when she speaks of upperclass cadets:

. . . You see them [in formation] when they're all out in their civilian clothes just like doing their own thing . . . they're smart because they've been around for two years and they have that on-off switch, like they can be like military and then not, instantly. And that's one of the hardest things for plebes to understand is that you can turn it off and on. (Kelly, Interview 2, August 25, 2007)

At least for this one young woman, changing in and out of civilian clothes is akin to switching "cadet-ness" on and off.

Untouchables. Just as they carry a plethora of military-issued and personal items, so, too, do the narrators carry less visible things along the way in their first semester, some of which help, some of which hinder. In their first interviews, for example, due to recent illness, they carry apprehension of the physical challenges of basic training because of recent health issues. Says Joy:

I'm really nervous, 'cause umm, I'm, I'm, I know I'm not in shape right now, 'cause in May, I got stress fractures in my legs, so I had to just, I couldn't run for like two months, and like the end of two months was like, last week [laugh], so I haven't ran in a long time. I mean, I've been to the gym, and I did the cross-trainer and everything, but like nothing really replaces running,

you know? Umm, I've been doing sit-ups and pushups, but like, it's the running that I know is gonna kill me (Joy, Interview 1, July 1, 2007)

Explains Alejandra:

I'm sick, 'cause I have a urinary tract infection so I need to use the bathroom a lot, I know that's kind of annoying also, and it's really going to stink during Basic, you can't use the bathroom that much, but I always get sick before I go anywhere, I got, I got this big 'ole lymph node infection, too, before I came, and I don't know why. I think God just likes to, I think he likes to be funny with me [laugh]. I'm gonna make you sick, there you go! [laugh] (Alejandra, Interview 1, July 1, 2007)

Being sick equates to being unable to perform to expectation, a deflation of confidence for one who identifies herself as in prime physical condition. Illness and injury are threatening. Jodie recalls that during basic training,

I freaked out one time 'cause later, or earlier on in the year, I had contracted mono, and mono usually, it doesn't ever go away, it comes back if you get stressed out or sick again, and evidently here, if you contract mono during Beast, they can send you home. At least that's what they've done in the past. And so I got really sick and I freaked out, 'cause I was like, oh no, you know, I've worked so hard to get here, and then two weeks into Beast, I come down with mono again and they kick me out, so that was my big thing was just, that was out of my control, and that's why I felt kind of like, panicked about it, 'cause it was out of my control. (Jodie, Interview 2, August 24, 2007)

Also consider, after seriously spraining her ankle several times during the summer, Alejandra says,

I wasn't on crutches. They asked me if I wanted crutches, but I told them no. . . . 'cause I didn't want to be broken. 'Cause all the kids in the back that had crutches were broken. I didn't want to be broken. (Alejandra, Interview 2, August 26, 2007)

In this excerpt, she divulges her sensitivity to others' perceptions. These passages divulge how physical ability is paramount to a cadet's identity, recalling the deep-seated conception that, just as Janda (2002) noted was true for the first classes of women, at the Academy, physical prowess counts the most.

A malady that surprised every narrator it affected was homesickness. Before she began basic training, Jodie theorizes:

. . . My mom would probably like me to say, "oh well, I'll just miss home, home, home, and my friends" and stuff, but I, I kind of got that separation over with the first year, and in fact that wasn't my hardest thing at all, I mean, I love my parents, I love being at home, I love hanging out with my parents, I know that's kind of weird to hear a teenager say that, but, umm, y'know, I enjoy the company of my parents but for some reason, it just wasn't hard to, to just go out and do what I needed to do on my own. So I don't think I'm going to have that homesickness feeling as much, especially this year since I've already been for a year in ---, which is farther away than New York, so. (Jodie, Interview 1, July 1, 2007)

Yet in her second interview, she recalls the necessity of connection to the outside world:

I'm telling you letters, letters is the key. It got everyone through Beast, it was, it's, it was like little kids in a candy store, I mean, it was, we almost became as a whole, it wasn't just me, it was everyone, people became panicked if they didn't get to go check their mail. They're like, sergeant, please, can we go check our mail? Are we going to go check mail today? (Jodie, Interview 2, August 24, 2007)

Similarly, Alejandra describes the emotion she attached to receiving mail:

I was homesick. It took me about a week and half to get the first letter. I thought everyone forgot about me. And I cried. I was so sad. But come to find out, [home state] mail just takes like nine days to get here. So, they really didn't forget about me. (Alejandra, Interview 2, August 26, 2007)

Although the mail eventually reached her, Alejandra continues her battle with homesickness:

'Cause the hardest part ever about the whole Beast, it wasn't really physical, even though that really was hard, . . . it wasn't really umm, discipline or anything like that, I didn't really have any big problem with discipline, it was just being homesick. 'Cause I wasn't expecting to be homesick. I was expecting it to be hard physically, I was expecting it to be very disciplinary, I was expecting all that, but I was not expecting to be homesick, so I wasn't prepared for that. Because I was ready to leave [hometown], I was so bored in [home state], I was like, ahh, I just wanna leave. And then I got here, I'm like, I wanna go back home! (Alejandra, Interview 2, August 26, 2007)

As we learned in Chapter II, surprise, as Louis (1980) posits, is an essential component of entry into new situations, the "culture shock" metaphor of transition. Prepared for physical challenges, prepared for military rigor, Alejandra feels like she can persist. But because she felt ready to leave home, the unexpected crisis of homesickness leaves her reeling. Like the male *bildungsroman*, she eagerly starts out, but, as perhaps the plot of female *bildungsroman* would depict, in a new setting, she feels perplexingly drawn back to her origin. Likewise, Kelly describes a surprising, but surmountable, bout with homesickness:

So R-Day was actually not that bad for me because I tried to keep like a really like, umm, optimistic, lighthearted mindset about it, and not take anything that they said too seriously, 'cause I didn't want to get down on the first day. So, I did, maybe like the second or the third day was the hardest like when you wake up and you're still there and you realize it, and you're like, oh, yeah, I'm stuck here, [laugh], but it wasn't, it wasn't impossible, and that was promising. The hardest part was I got homesick the first couple nights and that was, [pause] that was a challenge. (Kelly, Interview 2, August 25, 2007)

Carrying with her carefully chosen items and clothes, letters from home, and an array of emotions including fear of infirmity and homesickness, the protagonist continues to interact with her new setting. With its restrictions, structure, and stone gates, the institution encircles her so that she cannot wander far. Each full day of responsibilities carries her closer to the end of her semester and the end of her plebeian existence.

The Plebeian Motif

One might consider the military academy as a setting quite suitable to the male hero's conflict in the classical *bildungsroman*, one that charts an individual's integration into, or alienation from, society (Selinger, 1999). The military's livelihood is based in hierarchy, exemplified by the chain of command that functions in every military unit, large or small. At USMA, plebes reside at the lowest level of this chain—the Fourth Class, four years until graduation. This system restricts many aspects of cadets' lives, as Jodie recognizes:

There's not a whole lot of social time to talk to people and really get to know someone, which is, I think, sad in a way because you are supposed to be a team unit and I think letting plebes talk outside would probably promote more class unity but that's just me. I don't make the decisions. It's higher up [laugh]. (Jodie, Interview 2, August 24, 2007)

Hers is the dilemma of the female *bildungsroman*, the journey of protagonist who structures her identity relationally; not a "lone figure pushing against a painted backdrop," she tries to establish herself interactionally (Fraiman, 1993, p. 146). The common methods of interaction are often taken for granted, and the military ethos creates frustrations, as Kristen relays:

It's kind of boring and the only, like the absolute worst part of being a plebe to me, like I can deal with all the knowledge and everything 'cause I'm good at it, but I just hate when you're walking outside and you're not allowed to talk, like I guess it's self-discipline, which is like important to learn, but sometimes it's so annoying 'cause we're like walking somewhere and then we're like oh wait, we're actually supposed to be going in a different direction but you can't tell your friend that so you like try to like signal this way and you're like walking and like that's the worst part is just not being allowed to talk. (Kristen, Interview 2, August 25, 2007)

Yet the plebe identity, "the cadet rank of private," rests in the institutional conviction that the "Fourth Class learn to be followers" (USMA, 1991, p. 23) before they can be developed into leaders. Consider how Alejandra perceives this directive the night before Reception Day:

See the thing is, my senior year in high school, I never had to do push-ups 'cause I was the [JROTC] commander and I was the one givin' the push-ups, so now I gotta revert back to being a little, a little nothin', a little maggot, and I have to do the push-ups again, so I have to get my mind, "Okay, I'm not the battalion commander anymore, I'm not lieutenant colonel. I am a plebe. I am nothing." I have to revert back to that. Uhh. That's gonna be difficult, but I'm gonna do it. I know I can, and I know, I know I'm gonna want to give up, but I'm, I'm not gonna give up, 'cause I've always been one, I've always been taught if you give up, then you're always gonna think about what you could have had if you would have stayed in it, and uhh, I don't want to live my life regretting it. ... And uhh, I'm gonna miss it, ROTC. Because I was on top of the world in ROTC, I was on top of everything, I was like, "come on little man, you need to get down, you need to do push-ups" and now I'm gonna be like, "yes sir!" I'm going to be the one going, "yes sir" and uhh, but then, I'll be on top again, I'll be like, ahh! And then I'll have to graduate and I'll be on the bottom again, but least I'll be a officer. (Alejandra, Interview 1, July 1, 2007)

Although not entirely dismissing her will to power, her conception of the military is that its primary function is to cycle members through numerous rises and falls to maintain order. Her use of imagery to describe plebes—*little nothin'* and *little maggot*—reveal how harsh she expects life will be like over the next year. Also note

that her statement, "I know I'm gonna want to give up, but I'm, I'm not gonna give up, 'cause . . . I've always been taught if you give up, then you're always gonna think about what you could have had if you would have stayed in it" exemplifies a certain degree of grit, defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals by Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007), in part by studying first-year retention at West Point. In our next interview, when Alejandra relays how things have changed during the first week of academics, she alters her imagery, comparing her life instead to that of feeling like a child in school:

I like the fact that we have more freedom, but it still reminds me of high school 'cause we still have block schedules, and we're still like in a 24-hour school-surrounding environment, and we have like 4-hour study periods, but I can't believe I'm in college now. It's just like hasn't hit me yet that I'm, I'm older, and I'm actually here 'cause I still feel like I'm a little kid by the way we're treated 'cause we are plebes, we're the lowest class, and we're supposed to be treated like that, and eventually it'll hit me, maybe when I'm a cow or something, oh wait, I'm in college, ahh! (Alejandra, Interview 2, August 26, 2007)

Not living a totally meaningless (bug's) life, Alejandra now allows herself to contemplate a college mystique she believes she will not fully comprehend until further along. Surprisingly, by our third interview, as she contemplates the idea of choosing a major, she nearly compliments her status: "I don't know right now, I'm still like juggling everything at the moment, because I'm just a plebe, so I can have that, uhh, fulfillment of uhh, still thinking about everything" (Alejandra, Interview 3, December 17, 2007). That her characterization of plebe changes from "nothing" to "fulfillment" may indicate her more mature acceptance of one's transient institutional identity.

Nonetheless, several narrators are so hung up on being plebes that they are quite alert to instances when they can abandon plebe obligations (saluting upperclass cadets, cupping hands while walking, table duties, etc.), eschew their institutional identity, and be something other than plebes, if only briefly. For example, this passage describes what life is like for one of the narrators on the mountaineering team:

Umm, for the first day of practice, just one upperclassman went with each like, new plebe . . . And we were just like talking and he's like, oh yeah, like from now on, you can call me by my first name, and if you see me in the hallway and there's nobody around, like, you don't have to greet me, you can just be like, hey, so that was kind of cool, like I was like, ahh, this is awesome. And he also said that on like some nights, if you like want to stay really late climbing, I can just like stay with them, I don't have to like rush back to get to duties like so it was just kind of cool to get involved and feel more like, I'm like, part of it and not like, just a plebe. (Kristen, Interview 2, August 25, 2007)

Joy, instructed to travel to the Army-Navy game in civilian clothes, derives gratification from escaping the "not cool" association of being a plebe:

Umm, my friend's brother's a Firstie, so we went over to his room to go down to Baltimore, like, to go to his car to go to Baltimore, and we got to leave in civilian clothes, which we aren't supposed to do, but, he was like, oh, plebes aren't cool and we don't want to be seen with plebes so you can wear civilian clothes, but. We felt very, like, almost, what's the word, I don't know, bad, but we were proud of it. (Joy, Interview 3, December 17, 2007)

For Jodie, who had taken several of her first-year courses at the preparatory school and was already partially enrolled in the sophomore curriculum, her anti-plebe moments happened in the classroom:

I was in a class full of upperclassmen, so it is kind of a different feeling, there were only, there were four plebes in my class, but still, you just, the teachers I think were a little bit more relaxed, they kind of, it's like, oh yuks, they've been here for a year, so, so they don't treat you like plebes. (Jodie, Interview 3, December 18, 2007)

And, in the absence of non-plebe treatment by an authority, the protagonist can always take risks herself, as Joy relates:

Well, just if for me, at least, if I follow all the rules, I would just go completely crazy, and like, sometimes I just have to almost go out of my way to do something that I'm not supposed to just so I can keep my sanity [laugh]. Like, just little things, like we're supposed to keep our doors open for ESP [Evening Study Period] and like me and my roommate just close it and sometimes we'll wear civilian clothes in our room, just small things like that, umm . . . (Joy, Interview 3, December 17, 2007)

Although the restrictions may be the most difficult aspect of plebe life for these women, some of the narrators keep in mind that being a plebe is indeed a terminal position. Upperclass cadets, tactical leaders, even the Commandant can do a lot of things to plebes, but they cannot stop the clock. This inevitable passage of time provides hope:

Our first sergeant's kind of mean, he won't let us wear makeup or anything, or he won't let us do other privileges that other plebes have, but it's only until the end of the semester, so after this semester, it should be okay. (Alejandra, Interview 2, August 26, 2007)

It is worthy of note that an upperclass male cadet suppresses her choice to wear makeup just because she is a plebe, a "privilege" that only women can be denied, but she dismisses further thought, focusing on the future. Knowing that time will

eventually carry her to upperclass status, in her final interview, Kristen speculates about her coming years:

I've been thinking like a lot about, when like I'm going to be an upperclassman, like what I'm going to be like, I think. That is something that we talk about all the time. Umm, so it's kinda cool, like, I bet that the time that I'm gonna become like a yuk and have to be a team leader is gonna like come so fast. Even though it doesn't really feel like it's going to [laugh]. So, but I mean, like this year is already halfway over, so it'll be there before I know it, so, I've been thinking a lot about like how I'm gonna treat the plebes and stuff like that, umm, like I've definitely, I mean, as far as the yuks go, when they're being the team leaders, I'd say that probably like 90% of them are so laid back, ... and like, I definitely don't want to be like that [laugh], umm, I want to be more, like, involved as a team leader. I want to, kind of, it's like such a hard balance to strike in between like, being really laid back but then also not having people like hate you, like, [laugh], like if I was like really involved and kind of, telling them what to do all the time and stuff, then my plebe would probably hate me, so I've been thinking about that. Just like the little things, like the little tiny details of what you're going to be like when you're an upperclassman, like I'm probably thinking about that all the time, like when I'm just walking, 'cause we can't talk, so I just think about it all the time, but I'm really excited, umm, to be a team leader, that will be cool, but then also once I become a cow and a Firstie and you have like real big positions and you have the opportunity to be in like the higher positions and stuff like that, umm, like we don't really talk about that ever, with, I don't know, like our squad leaders or anything, but we're definitely watching and like all the time, we'll talk about like what, if we're gonna be, like Beast cadre, like, how we'll act, if we'll be like mean and stuff, so I've decided that I don't wanna be mean, but I also don't wanna be like, the really, really nice one, 'cause I want to make them have to like work hard but I don't want them to—like I had a squad leader the second detail who, no matter how hard we worked, she'd still act like we were so stupid and so dumb and all this stuff, so I still hold like a grudge against her, like, I can't see her in the hallway without just getting angry, so I don't want to be that person. But I do want to be somewhat stern, so that's a big thing, like I feel like this semester you almost can just completely forget that you're like quote in the Army, even though we don't really do Army stuff, like, we like, there's like nothing, like some of the upperclassmen take like they're like military science classes and stuff like that, like we don't take that, we've had training three times the entire semester like, there's no military stuff at all, so I almost feel like if you were to make me start Beast again tomorrow, it would be just as hard as it was the first time [laugh] 'cause I've just, it's not like that at all anymore. So that's weird. And I wasn't expecting that at all. (Kristen, Interview 3, December 19, 2007)

She connects her past self, the one developed in Cadet Basic Training who yearns for more military instruction, to her future self, embodied in the ideal and balanced mentor. That she spends required silent walks considering her future leadership style—not her coursework, her undetermined major, or even her weekend plans—in contrast to the interactions she has had with upperclass cadets this first year represents how influential the Academy's emphasis on leadership is for this young woman and how important these relationships are to her. In a metaphorical way, Jodie recognizes the influence of the institutional mission, too, saying: "we're just in a big leadership petrie dish... it's just a big experiment, poking, people poking at us, see what happens, you know, put someone in this situation and see what they do—they screw up, well, they screw up, and hopefully they learn from it" (Jodie, Interview 2, August 24, 2007). These compelling interactions between the narrators and their society bring us to a fourth motif.

The Self and Other Motif

I'm gonna miss, umm, individuality, 'cause my hair, didn't used to be a natural color [laugh]. It used to be like red and green and blue and it was orange, and blonde. But you can't really have individuality here at West Point, it's part of the requirements, so uhh, I had to dye my hair back (Alejandra, Interview 1, July 1, 2007)

A *bildungsroman* has "a dual focus, inward toward the self and outward to society" (Hirsch, 1979, p. 300). Whereas the male version often pits the two entities against one another, the protagonist of the female *bildungsroman* structures her identity relationally, resistant to the self-directive tendency of patriarchal society (Selinger, 1999). The women of this study often find themselves operating on

multiple planes, which emerge through their stories as the contrast between military/civilian, plebe/upperclass, female/male, and individual/unit. Such is the case with Alejandra above, realizing that her hairstyle is a personal sacrifice for the sake of the communal culture.

Military/civilian. Having a profession of arms is only as recent in American history as the late twentieth century (Segal & Segal, 2004), and although the dichotomy between the military and civilian world is somewhat new, these young women born in the late 1980s do not know society differently. Joy, as the child of a military officer, characterizes that the military "is just like a different civilization" (Joy, Interview 1, July 1, 2007). This contrast between civilian and military is heightened by the summer training experience, explained, "at first, like, at the very beginning of Beast, like anytime we had any contact with like the civilian world it was like so exotic and stuff" (Kristen, Interview 2, August 25, 2007). Kelly, however, recognizes a distinction between the two earlier, when she was visiting other institutions:

I also visited --- and ---, which were the other schools that I was looking at, and I didn't get the same feeling and I'd also felt that people weren't as much like [accented word] me because there's a lot of people there who were very different beliefs from me, or like, I guess you would say, like, I have this passion to, like, serve, like I was going to be in ROTC whether or not I went to those schools or if I came here, so it was a real eye opening experience; I didn't feel as comfortable there and I definitely knew I wanted to come here, so. (Kelly, Interview 1, June 30, 2007)

As a subjective knower (Belenky et al., 1997), her decision is very much an intuitive one. That is, *feeling* different from others was enough to confirm her choice. West Point represents an atypical postsecondary institution, and the narrators ponder the

differences, frequently comparing West Point to the symbolic "regular college." For example,

I probably wouldn't do Beast again 'cause it was really hard physically, but as far as like the camaraderie that I had with like my brothers and everything, like I think of everybody like my brothers and sisters now, like we're that close now, and it's something you wouldn't get at a regular college (Alejandra, Interview 2, August 26, 2007)

Moreover,

Y'know, someone comes in your room, like, we had a pillow fight last night, a giant pillow fight between the Corps and I just couldn't go. I had so much stuff to do and people understand, they're like, okay, that's okay. Call me if you need help, so, I think in most colleges, you probably wouldn't get that. You'd maybe get more flak for not participating in those kinds of events. (Jodie, Interview 2, August 24, 2007)

Jodie also contrasts the interaction she has with her faculty members, comparing it to an imagined college life at larger campuses, many of which she had considered in her original college application process:

I really like the relationship you have with your teacher. They understand your life, and then they know you, they know you by name, you know, you see them walking down the street, they know who you are, and I like that, being able to email them on a day-to-day basis, say hey, I need to come in for some extra instruction, and they understand. I don't think you really get that, they say, people say that you get that at larger schools depending on what school you go to, but I don't think that's maybe necessarily true, until you get into your senior, you know, maybe your junior, senior year undergraduate work, major work, where your classes are going to be smaller, but. Especially as a freshman, this is great. (Jodie, Interview 3, December 18, 2007)

Later, she continues by discussing the 18-credit course load that students at West Point carry. She speaks of testing herself in the other regular-college world,

. . . it's just a different style. Here we've gotten so used to it, it's like, oh, yeah, but sometimes I wish I could just spend a couple weeks at a regular college just to see how I would do, just to see the difference, but no one would really know the difference. (Jodie, Interview 3, December 18, 2007)

In each of the stories from the first interview series, there echoes this common refrain: these young women feel that they are ready to leave home, contrasting themselves to friends and peers with differing long-term goals. Like the *bildungsroman* hero who feels frustrated that there are options not available in their hometown settings (Buckley, 1974), the military academy is an ideological representation of a different destiny. Says Michelle:

I like traveling and I'm like, really independent, so, and I've always been like—not like you can see it or anything—but more mature than people my age, like a few friends of mine, umm. Like a few of them I can deal with, but I like older people. They're just more mature, I guess, so I've, I've been ready to leave. (Michelle, Interview 1, June 30, 2007)

As her first semester is coming to a close, Alejandra remarks,

I think the whole West Point experience is just different. Like all my other friends, they're, like, stuck at home, kinda wasting their lives away, going to a community college—not that there's anything wrong with a community college—it's just that they're not really, they don't really care, they're just partying, and uhh, you know, I party in a different way. I party on Thursday nights during spirit dinners, and then go out and have huge pillow fights, while they're getting drunk, and wasted, and it's going to pay off in four years, and it certainly don't pay them off all that well. (Alejandra, Interview 3, December 17, 2007)

Also, Kelly describes feeling incongruent among her family members upon returning home during the semester:

Umm, Thanksgiving was the first time I went home and that was an interesting experience, too, 'cause it was a little bit weird for me, I felt kind of out of place for awhile, mostly 'cause my cousins aren't people who have any exposure to the military at all, and they were around and umm, I don't think they really understood a lot of the stuff, [laugh] if I tried to explain it to them, so I felt a little bit out of place. (Kelly, Interview 3, December 15, 2007)

Seeing opportunities for comparison everywhere, these young women contrast themselves to civilian counterparts before, during, and after their first semester of college. On one level, their assessments resemble an unsettled, "what if the grass is greener," internal questioning, but on another, the women express that their choice to attend the military academy has been a fulfilling one.

Plebe/upperclass. The ongoing conflict between plebe and upperclass cadet manifests itself in nearly every interview of the second and third series. Upperclass cadets provide the opportunity for comparison and contrast—recall Kristen's consideration of her future leadership style—done so in a way that resembles the patterns exhibited by subjective knowers (Belenky et al., 1997). Jodie, for example, spends a lot of time considering how the methods of the upperclass cadets would be more effective:

When someone really yells at me for something, you take it, and it's like, okay, mental check note, don't do that in the future around them, they don't like that, then you just move on. And most of the time, what they don't realize is that the stuff that they say to us is amplified by a hundred times, and they may say something in passing but they don't even think twice about, but everyone remembers exactly what they said, exactly how they said it, and it sticks with them. And I don't think a lot of the cadre really realize that. . . .

And they say [laundry duty] is not meant to be a haze, but it is. 'Cause you don't need nine to ten third or second classmen out there monitoring plebes taking laundry. We know what we're supposed to do. We will get it done quickly. You guys are the problem, you guys are making us not, y'know, you're holding us, and they're like, "well if you just know your knowledge,

then you'll get through," and, but when you're intentionally trying to trip us up by asking us weird questions and then impugning our honor, that's, it's just an annoyance, just an annoyance.

. . . And I think that's probably the one sensitive spot in every cadet, it's like, when an upperclassmen questions why, like why are you here. And it's not like so much, why did you come here, please tell me. It's more of a, why are you here, please leave my Corps, I don't want you here, you know, you're a disgrace to the Long Gray Line, blah blah blah. I've been told that like fifteen times, "you're a disgrace to the Long Gray Line, I'm going to do pushups in pentance [sic] for your, your stupidity and ridiculousness," and I'm just like, I mixed up two words, y'know, I put "to" before "impervious"—how is that a disgrace to the Long Gray Line, but evidently, it is. (Jodie, Interview 2, August 24, 2007)

Jodie is a subjective knower in a dualistic world. The USMA Fourth Class system is designed to be black-and-white, right-from-wrong, leader-versus-follower. Jodie, however, has a sensible intuition that separates the important from the mundane, although external authority continually challenges that voice.

Despite the boundaries of the class system, the novice students often find someone, an upperclass cadet who offers instruction and encouragement. In theory, this mentor should be their "team leader," a sophomore (yuk) who dedicates regular time to familiarize the plebe in all things military. In the narrators' stories, the characterizations of this particular person varied, from "cool" or "nice" to "laid back" and even "mean," with occasional elaboration:

I know that my team leader, like, we don't do anything, like we have to get like I think two in a week and, so she'll come over on like Sunday afternoon and talk to me for like five minutes, she'll be like okay, mark this down as this, umm, and like, I definitely don't want to be like that. (Kristen, Interview 3, December 19, 2007)

Similarly, Kelly says:

I have a team leader who's not the greatest [laugh], she's kind of known for being like the spaciest [sic] person ever, and so I usually have to suggest the FCDTs, which is like the Fourth Class Development, and umm, they were having a branching seminar, so I suggested to my team leader that we go that day (Kelly, Interview 3, December 15, 2007)

Alejandra depicts the relationship with her team leader as problematic, but yet when she describes a deteriorating relationship with her boyfriend back at home, her team leader is the one to offer her shared experience:

. . . 'cause my team leader says the same thing, she was dating someone before she came—she's a yuk right now—but she was dating someone when she was in high school that went here, and she didn't understand why he couldn't call her, she was always upset at him, then she came here then she finally figured it out, well, you don't really have time for a social life (Alejandra, December 17, 2007)

In the genre of *bildungsroman*, these fixed characters are called educators, who "serve as mediators and interpreters between the two confronting forces of self and society" (Hirsch, 1979, p. 298). (Ironically, in wandering into literary criticism, analytic terrain far from my starting point, I discover that the referent "educator" is a key term.) As discussed in Chapter II, in education, these Vygotskian "more capable peers," aid the novice through a learning situation, as "organizational insiders" assist the newcomer to a workplace. While the educator or more capable peer may be the team leader, frequently, it is not. Throughout the transitioning process, Kelly, for example, seeks advice and counsel from a number of more capable peers, one from the United States Senate Youth program:

. . . they had military mentors there [inflection rising] which was huge [accented word] for me, it was so exciting, 'cause you just worked one on one with a military officer the whole week and they lead you around, and one of

mine was a female Marine and she taught me how to do like the sock buns, umm, and she said that they're like a lifesaver . . . so that was a great piece of advice (Kelly, Interview 1, June 30, 2007)

As her friend's older sister attended the Air Force Academy,

I did ask her like some questions about like what I should do. She said I should get my legs waxed, so I did that. Because she said you won't have time to shave very much, so I was like, ahh, I'll just do it, 'cause I want to be a girl, I don't, by no means are they turning me in any way masculine, so I did get my legs waxed so I wouldn't have hairy legs for basic training and then if I don't have time to shave, there is no big deal there [laugh] (Kelly, Interview 1, June 30, 2007)

The two examples above suggest an informal network of military women, which shares preening information in these cases, to help the newcomer adjust to the daily demands of military timing. In a more serious situation during the third week of classes, Kelly also invokes the use of another more capable peer, relaying how she made the decision to report her first-semester roommate for a USMA Honor Code violation, a weighty decision to make:

I approached someone who I like trust very, very much in at school and I told her about it and she told me, too, that it was up to me whether or not I wanted to report it but she highly recommended I do (Kelly, Interview 3, December 15, 2007)

Female/male. In Gee's (2001) model of identity, biological sex can be considered a part of Nature-identity, becoming meaningful because it constitutes the "kind of person" one is. Gender, however, may be understood as Discursive-identity, an "identity that is produced and reproduced in the ways in which people . . . talk to and about others in discourse and dialogue" (p. 108). Gender is so tied to the

understanding of the cadet experience that these women themselves often distinguish themselves as "female cadets." Says linguist Robin Lakoff,

The use of either woman or female with terms such as 'president, speaker, doctor, professor suggests that a woman holding that position is marked—in some way unnatural, and that it is natural for men to hold it (so we never say 'male doctor,' still less 'man doctor'). (as cited in Safire, 2007, p. 20)

At a definitional level, the word "female" connotes biological category, but in West Point vernacular, it qualifies experience:

. . . As a female, I didn't feel like Basic was any harder like for females, which I kinda, I didn't necessarily know what to expect for that, like I'd heard some females say like, oh yeah, just because you're female it'll be more difficult, or they might call you out, like, you know, specifically try and get you aligned, and I heard in the past them say that female upperclassmen'll get on your back harder because you are female, 'cause they want you squared away, but I had a female squad leader first detail and she was actually awesome and she really, there was nothing that was, made her, you know, I didn't feel like I was any different than any of the other people in my squad. (Kelly, Interview 2, August 25, 2007)

From a linguistic perspective, the oxymoron "female upperclassmen" is an example of how pre-1976 language was augmented, never rejected, to accommodate the presence of women at the Academy. From a cultural perspective, Kelly's testimony underscores the lore of upperclass women, notoriously regarded as more critical of kindred women than they are of men (Janda, 2000), as she checked her squad leader's treatment of her own performance against other cadets in her unit. Although she thinks otherwise after the summer training, Kelly's expectation of differing treatment nonetheless colored her perspective, just as Alejandra relates in her first interview:

I do think it's also good because I'm a woman and I'm going, and umm, a lot of people are gonna be like, [hissing sound]. See, with ROTC I had so much sexist actions against me. When I was a battalion commander and my cousin, he's a bad sexist, and I have like this whole group of guys against me in ROTC, they formed a group of guys that would try to get me out of battalion commander position and put their friend, which was a, a male, in my position. And it was horrible—I, I got so much, so much crap from them, and they, they'd cuss me out and everything, and I could give them push-ups and I could give them demerits, but I really couldn't do anything outside the classroom. And they'd like, they'd always call me "woman," they wouldn't call me, you know, they wouldn't call me "colonel," they'd call me "woman" instead of "colonel" and oh, it was horrible. (Alejandra, Interview 1, July 1, 2007)

In this constructed dialogue, *woman* becomes a derogatory term, the converse to *colonel*. Although specific to a certain group of teenage boys in one particular school, Alejandra brings this toxic interaction with her to West Point, presenting it to shield herself from further surprise due to her gender. Kristen, who at the outset of her summer training and first semester was most concerned about being "singled out," subsequently told of occasions when she was recognized—but gender is complexly woven within this recognition. As one example:

. . . [my] platoon leader . . . he's like, "can you come over here for a minute" and he was standing in front of me in the hallway and I was like, "oh my gosh, I'm gonna get in trouble." But he's like, "I just wanted to say you've been doing a really good job and that you've been doing really well on like our runs in the morning," 'cause I was like one of the only girls in our running group, so, I'm kind of like weird or whatever. Umm, he's like, "and all the other squad leaders are like impressed by you so just keep doing what you're doing." That was like really cool, so that was like the highlight of the first couple weeks. (Kristen, Interview 2, August 25, 2007)

Being in the running group makes her "weird" but she also believes that she impresses upperclass cadets in spite of being a woman.

Although there are instances where the narrators recognize the hypermasculine environment, they respond varyingly. Joy shrugs it off, saying, "oh, it was like one of the Naked Man things happening, and like, I just realized it's just one big fraternity [laugh] at West Point, like it's just so many guys," (Joy, Interview 3, December 17, 2007). Jodie's interpretation is that the uneven gender ratio provides women extraordinary dating opportunities while she herself can rise above that behavior:

. . . Just being in a man's environment, it, it is kind of overwhelming for a—especially, y'know, . . . some of these girls come in here at 17 and 18 and it's like, most of these guys that are here are probably what their parents think is the perfect guy, y'know, they're athletic, they're smart, they're, most of them are very good looking and, and it's like, "wow, I'm in this whole big pot of, y'know, there are about 400-500-600 girls, and 3000 guys" and they just go, they go overboard, and then, I don't know, it's, it's just hard, I hope girls learn to focus and kind of forget about that. (Jodie, Interview 1, July 1, 2007)

Worried that such reckless behavior might harm women's image, these comments emphasize the prevalence of the "slut" stereotype (Timmons, 1992) that military women encounter. Also, although Jodie nearly reduces women's purpose for coming to the Academy simply to hook up with the "perfect guy," we cannot forget that "the process of mate selection preoccupies most of us in our teens and 20s" (Bee, 2000, p. 202), and that the development of healthy interpersonal relationships is considered an integral part to student development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). As Alejandra mentions,

I've made good friends here, like, three close friends, I can say. Some other friends, like since I'm a female, it's kinda hard to make friends, because most guys who want to be your friend don't want to be your friend, they want to be something more, and then when you're like, no, I'm not interested, then they

stop talking to you. This happened a lot, unfortunately. But uhh, what can you say. They're desperate. (Alejandra, Interview 3, December 17, 2007)

Individual/unit. Military leaders place great importance on fostering unit cohesion, the feeling of unity based on interpersonal relationships within a group (Vecchio & Brazil, 2007). Descriptions of units at all levels—squad, platoon, company, and Corps—emerge in the women's stories. For example:

. . . We had like a company barbeque and stuff this week and we've had a lot of opportunities to do fun stuff and so it doesn't, I don't feel personally like I'm missing out on a lot of social opportunity and I know my company's arranging a lot of events and activities to be done in the company and it seems like that will be really fun, so, like they're doing things like going skydiving, going to the Renaissance Festival, stuff like normal college people would do (Kelly, Interview 2, August 25, 2007)

Within the descriptions of their experiences, the narrators regularly offer commentary on the qualities of their units, determining what value to assign their lot, based on the perception of other companies:

. . . Yeah, I don't know if it's like, by company or something, like, just like the reputation but my company's not very like, studious, so, I feel like most people don't do very much homework at all (Kristen, Interview 3, December 19, 2007)

Largely, the women are concerned with how much fun their company has and how much they are hazed—sometimes, the two are interrelated:

But, I'm pretty lucky, 'cause I got in X-X, and they don't haze very much at all. Umm, they do sometimes, but it was funny hazing, we had to carry around toothbrushes and recite knowledge, which by the way, I hate knowledge. I've learned most of it eventually. And they make us do like funny things like they'll throw Gatorade bottles and say it's grenades, jump down, help your partner, and then, they'll say, oh, you got a broken leg, or oh, your

head was blown off, so then you got to like fire at 'em and carry your buddy down the stairs, or something, or got to drag 'em, I got dragged, when my milk carton exploded in my pocket. And I was dragged, and my milk, through the barracks, and it was pretty bad, I smelt really bad after that, umm, and all in all, our company's not really that bad, I like them. (Alejandra, Interview 2, August 26, 2007)

Joy anticipates that her spirited company will be an asset during her first year experience:

So like, it's a fun company to be in, apparently we're called --- Zoo 'cause a lot of crazy things happen in our company and like they told me a couple years ago there was a riot or something and it was started by our company [laughs] and like they were throwing printers out the window or something and umm, umm, a couple years ago, a Firstie set a door on fire 'cause, he, I forgot why, like, he took a dustpan and put lighter fluid in it and threw it under the door and lit it [laughs] and it lit the whole door on fire. [laughs] Yeah, and there are just, a bunch of stories, like Zoo stories, they say, and they say we're in a very spirited company, so, I'm excited for the rest of the year. (Joy, Interview 2, August 26, 2007)

After she has had the chance to size up the other companies, at the end of the semester, she construes that the Academy has dealt her a good hand:

. . . My company's easier than others I think [inflection rising], not easier, but like less strict, I guess [inflection rising], the upperclassmen are more like cool about things, like they, they actually understand that we're people, I guess, I don't know, I talked to some of my friends and I would hate life if I was in their company. (Joy, Interview 3, December 17, 2007)

Perhaps Joy may be referring to Jodie's company, which Jodie describes as

. . . hard core, our company's, they're really big on standards, but they're some really loose people in my company, I don't know how anybody can just, we still—Maybe it's because the other companies see us outside, maybe in the outside world, we're very, very like, up to standards and stuff: we don't, we don't really fall out in formation, plebes don't ever get to fall out in formation, at lunch and breakfast we still do our duties like we're supposed to, you

know, we greet, and do the, do our table duties and we still have to have certain amounts of knowledge and know the meals and some companies, they don't even do that. They just sit down, they eat, you know, no duties, no nothing, and so I think, when they float people at lunches and we have other people coming in and they see that we still do our duties and we still, you know, are asked questions by the upperclassmen, it's like oh gosh, it's a hot, hot company. Umm, but, if you really were in our company, for any length of time, you would know they're just as goofy as anyone else. (Jodie, Interview 3, December 18, 2007)

Thus, companies are more than the sum of their parts; they take on personas as rules are or are not enforced, lore and rumors are passed along, and enjoyable events encompass the plebes. Interestingly, as these cadets appraise their companies, they defend their own, accentuating attributes over any negative implications.

Tradition figures prominently. Certain rituals highlight these new cadets' first week. For example, at the time of our second interview, recent events included the Plebe Retreat, a plebe pillow fight, the first Thursday night spirit dinner, and Ring Weekend for the Class of 2008, during which the plebes annoy the firsties in a long-standing known as "Ring Poop." Consider these musings:

. . . Everybody's in a really good mood, 'cause today is Ring Poop, so we get to harass the firsties, and the firsties are excited 'cause they get their rings, and then we're excited 'cause we get to go on the Plebe Retreat. (Jodie, Interview 2, August 24, 2007)

Also:

I don't think there's any other college in the country that has like a 13,000-kid pillow fight and gets to chase down and tackle the upperclassman and [laughing], and surround them as singing some Ring Poop, so it's pretty cool, and I really like all the tradition and all the little things that make this school different than everywhere else, like, definitely, always a positive reminder of why you come here. (Kelly, Interview 2, August 25, 2007)

Another example:

West Point cadets like to have fun, too, it's just behind the scenes, when no one ever sees it. And the pillow fight, we had a pillow fight Thursday, 'cause Thursday was spirit dinner, and we dressed up like nerds, And you wouldn't believe how good you could dress up like a nerd using the issued uniform clothes that West Point has. Obviously their uniform clothing is extremely nerdy, because everyone looked so good Thursday. (Alejandra, Interview 2, August 26, 2007)

Some of the narrators depicted a communal feeling surrounding the end of basic training, when cadets complete a 12-mile march back to post, prior to the onset of Reorganization Week. Says Joy,

I loved marchback. And umm, we got to eat like an entire lunch in the middle of it, then we just walked down the street, or the road towards West Point with like the band playing and it was just nice like when we got to the gate and saw all those parents and like alumni and stuff waving at us, with like all these signs and posters, like, I could tell, like, some, it affected like some of the cadets there, like my classmates, like they were really happy about it. (Joy, Interview 2, August 26, 2007)

Others, however, were not as affected by the event:

I wasn't really excited, 'cause as I said, our squad leader was like psyching us out for Reorg week and we were kind of dreading that but. And like, also, everybody's always like the marchback's such an amazing feeling 'cause you're finishing Beast or whatever, but I kind of feel like Reorg week was just another part of Beast 'cause you're still a New Cadet and everything, so I didn't really feel any sense of relief during it, or like feel like the end was in sight, so it was just kind of another ruck march. And then they were like, it's so amazing, 'cause all the people have the signs for you and all that but I didn't even see the people with the signs 'cause all the people around me were like blocking me. So it was just kind of another ruck march. It wasn't like some life-changing experience or anything. (Kristen, Interview 2, August 25, 2007)

The women also include descriptions of communal events that were context-specific. Because they recur in several narratives, I recognized that these one-time events help construct a bond between the individuals and their classmates and members of the Corps. For example, that the release of the seventh of the *Harry Potter* novels coincided with the summer training period is important to them:

. . . just the cadre, they, they like to be jerks. They really do. They get a kick out of it. Like my sergeant, I don't know, I'm kind of a big nerd, I love *Harry Potter*, and they ruined the end of the book for us, just for no reason. So it was like, what are you doing? Just being jerks for no reason. (Jodie, Interview 2, August 24, 2007)

In a similar situation, Joy says:

. . . And eventually like, it spread around the whole company, we were just, umm, distributing Harry Potter pages and eventually the last week at Buckner our XO, we were doing mail call, and umm, he called my roommate's name up and like handed her this thick envelope, and he, he had heard about umm other companies having problems with Harry Potter, so like he felt it and was like, this isn't Harry Potter, is it, and she said, yes it is. So our entire company got in trouble for that and we had a storytime the next day and they ruined the entire book for us, like, they went from the beginning to the end and some people like, I thought it was funny, I'm really, I am a really obsessed *Harry Potter* fan but I, I didn't mind it, I thought it was funny, but some people were like actually mad about it but umm, yeah, ---[company name], we're like known as the Harry Potter kids now, like Pottergate scandal. (Joy, Interview 2, August 26, 2007)

At the annual Army-Navy football game, a tradition of its own, cadets, perhaps feeling defeated enough on the field, embattle the auxiliary units of the opposing team, providing folklore for years to come:

. . . probably the best play of the game was when one of the Firsties from a different company jumped out of the stands and tackled one of Navy's

cheerleaders and then tackled Navy's mascot. It was exciting. (Michelle, Interview 3, December 16, 2007)

Offers another:

Did you hear about like, one of the cadets like tackling the mascot? Yeah, and the cheerleader. One of them was my platoon leader [laugh], yeah, he tackled the, the cheerleader guy and [laugh], like, yeah, people took pictures of it and like two yuks in my company like made a little poem, dedicated to him, so, yeah, it was really funny. Yeah and after, like, he ran back, we were at the very front and so he just like jumped over into the field, so we pulled him up and then the Com came and like saluted him [laugh], so that was, that was funny. (Joy, Interview 3, December 17, 2007)

These kinds of rituals and isolated events point to the strength of Gee's (2001)

Affinity-identity, the common shared experiences that define a group, but yet under the purview of a larger institution. With that in mind, Kelly and Kristen, in the following passage, at times resist this orchestrated identity, recognizing the value of privacy instead:

. . . so people really do make an effort to just get together and enjoy one another's company once in awhile, but for me, lately, at least, just in the first week, I've just needed my own time, just a little bit of space for myself, like, I just needed my own time to get my stuff in order. (Kelly, Interview 2, August 25, 2007)

Likewise, Kristen says:

I guess as far as spirit dinners and everything else goes, like when you, when I was like thinking about coming here and everything, umm, like you hear I guess from the admissions department and all that like all these big like fancy things, like Army-Navy and spirit dinners, all these like officially sanctioned events, you think they're going to be so cool, but when you actually get here, like the really fun stuff is just when you're allowed to kind of be alone for a little bit and just chill out. (Kristen, Interview 3, December 19, 2007)

Resistance to Affinity-identity—such as Kelly's desire to be alone and Kristen's proclivity to downplay the mystique ascribed to certain institutional rituals, as she did in this excerpt and the preceding marchback story—is remindful that unique perspectives of individuals within the group are commonly ignored in order to exalt unit cohesion (Vecchio & Brazil, 2007).

The Reflection Motif

Just as readers are often more aware of broader themes than the heroine herself in a novel, these narrators, who did not mention reflection specifically, offer reflection in varying degrees. When I initially began this research, I pursued it to better understand reflection as a part of the first-year experience for college students. The third of my research questions concerning cadets' thoughts at days' end, attempts to capture the ongoing conversation with oneself about what is happening. As Chapter II details, reflection is woven deeply through the educational literature, but lacks firm agreement. As such, I kept the major tenets of reflection in mind as I examined the narratives for examples of "messy" examinations of one's context and actions, looking for statements that implied increases in knowledge of the self despite ambiguity.

Language is designed for communication (Schiffon, 1987), if only to communicate with oneself. One cannot be reflecting, "turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious and consecutive consideration" (Dewey, 1933, p. 3), without attaching language in the process. During their first semester, the narrators encounter situations that provide a meaningful opportunity to verbalize reflection. Some do. Some do not. In the story below, Kelly's reflective statement is italicized:

Also like, one of the most interesting things about this semester is I was involved in an honor case, it wasn't mine personally, but I had to turn someone in for honor, and that is one of those experiences that only the Academy'll probably give you insight to, but really changes your life. Umm, it occurred about three weeks into my plebe year, you know, my first semester at the Academy and I never thought I'd be really faced with it, but it occurred with my roommate and umm, it involved her breaking regulations and then lying about it, her and another individual. And when she told me about it, at first it didn't even occur to me that it was wrong, but after I slept on it, I, it suddenly hit me that by her telling me what she told me I could be in trouble as well so I approached someone who I like trust very, very much in at school and I told her about it and she told me, too, that it was up to me whether or not I wanted to report it but she highly recommended I do, so. I did go through with reporting everything and it still hasn't officially, like been solved yet, it's umm, the honor trial was just this past week where I had to testify and it kind of brought everything back again, so her verdict is still in the process of going through, I think the Commandant's office right now, but it put me in a very awkward situation with my company and with my, with her as a roommate. They did have to move her room and understandably, she wasn't very happy with me for a long time, *but in the end I feel like I did the right thing and I feel like most people may not have done it, and I can see why, it's so much easier to pick the, like, the easier wrong over the harder right, and that's definitely shaped my experience at the Academy, I think, for my first semester of plebe year; it'll be something that sticks with me and it'll probably affect how I relate, in terms of the Academy, for the next four years.* I'm considering maybe getting into the honor process as, like trying to apply for my company honor position, when I actually get the chance because it did impact me so much but at the same time I'm not sure I want to be part of that everyday 'cause it's a very stressful situation. (Kelly, Interview 3, December 15, 2007)

The emotional elements of this particular incident—trust, loyalty, inner discomfort, tension, even courage—are significant to her reflection, reminiscent of the Boud et al. (1985) definition of reflection, a process in which a person recaptures an experience, attends to the feelings associated with that event, and places it in the context of current knowledge. Further, demonstrating the pervasiveness of institutional language, the words "the easier wrong over the harder right" embroidered within her passage nearly directly cite the Cadet Prayer. This lesson

West Point teaches means "that people frequently do not respond well to actions of pure integrity around them" (Snair, 2004, p. 50). Her last statements are revelatory of Kelly's internal and ongoing evaluation process, recognition that the experience will continue to have lasting effects throughout the course of her education.

On the other hand, in reflection-worthy occasions, narrators did not always take the opportunity to ascribe meaning to narrated events. For example, consider the protracted story of Alejandra's chaotic Plebe-Parent Weekend, a tradition that takes place in October:

I was really looking forward to it . . . my mom came up and my brother came up, on a plane, so my boyfriend, he was gonna work and he wasn't, he wasn't gonna come up 'cause he had to work, but he quit his job and he drove up from [home state] to see me, so that was like a 20-hour drive by himself, so they all get there, and I'm really happy and everything's going good, but umm, the plebe that was put in charge of our company, our platoon, was a real, real, big jerk, I guess you could say and I didn't know that we couldn't have them in the barracks, so I invited them into the barracks, and he found out, and he tried to turn me in to get me a company board, whenever like three other people have their parents in the barracks, and there are supposedly were some guys doing other stuff in the barracks with their girlfriends, and he knew about it, but he wasn't gonna turn any of them in, just me, and umm, that kinda ruined it to begin with, and then after that, my mom's eye got all swollen, she couldn't see, she couldn't really walk, 'cause it would hurt her so bad, so she didn't really get to see most of West Point 'cause her eyes were kinda swollen shut, and [laugh] it was just a really bad time [pause] and then umm, I kept getting in a fight with my boyfriend about something, and then we tried to go, on Sunday, we were going to go to the city, but my mom's eye was swollen shut, so she couldn't go, so I was going to drive out to the Palisades Mall, but I got lost and I couldn't find it, and then we ended up in the city, but we wanted to get out, because I had to be back by formation. And it took us three hours to get out of the city, didn't even look around the city, we just drove around trying to get out, like we drove around in a huge circle trying to get out and it took forever and we had to stop at Yankee Stadium, call a friend and get her to do MapQuest to get us out and then when we got out, I had to go run back and uhh, I was late, like five minutes to formation, and then my squad leader's like, oh, what happened, and that was a really bad weekend. And then my mom and my brother went back, and my boyfriend tried to go back, but he kept getting lost, 'cause he

doesn't understand a lot of English, it's mostly Spanish, so he kept getting lost and all the road signs, and he couldn't get out, and he was like, freaking out, and so he slept in his car that night, he was like yeah, I'll just try tomorrow, but then he decided to try in the middle of the night, so he tried again, but when he tried, he hit something in the road and his tire went flat, when it went flat, it ruined his rims, so he couldn't use a donut, so he had to push his car to a nearby little town that was like near Highland Falls, and slept in his car that night and uhh, the next morning, some pastor at a church called a taxi cab for him, so he took a taxi cab, and paid like a hundred something dollars to go to New York City to stay with his brother, 'cause his brother lives there, and so he worked for like a week to get enough money to pay to fix his car and then he sold his car to his brother to get enough money to pay for a bus ticket to get back to [home state] and it was a really [laugh] bad week, and I missed two days of classes—well, I was late to two classes, so I was going to get hours, but I tried to explain the story to my academic officer, and he's like, I don't know if that's an excuse, but I'll try, and I never got hours, so I guess it was a good excuse. And uhh, so that was a really, that was a really bad weekend, and I was expecting a lot better. (Alejandra, Interview 3, December 17, 2007)

As I first listened to her tell this tale, I recall anticipating more reflective commentary than twice-declared "it was a really bad weekend." Alejandra, who alludes to a rocky relationship with her boyfriend throughout the interview, perhaps could have drawn more from this story. Just as one platoon member in O'Brien's (1990) *The Things They Carried* asserts, "there's a definite moral here," and another retorts, "I don't see no moral" (pp. 13-14), the ability to re-examine a situation is a function of perspective. Consider Michelle, who participated in a field trip to Sing Sing Prison with her psychology class:

It's scary [laughs.] Umm, it's actually, the prisoners have more privileges than we do here because, well, I mean of course, they're prisoners, they've committed crimes and I don't think we have, but, they stay in their rooms all day and sometimes they have to clean, they go out to eat when they're told to eat, we kinda do the same things, but they get to watch TV, and we can only watch it on the weekends, so. It was kind of funny to spot the similarities. (Michelle, Interview 3, December 16, 2007)

An opportunity to reflect on the connections between criminology and psychology missed, she instead uses the opportunity to make a quasi-comic comparison of the prisoners' daily regimen to her own.

Particularly during the third interviews, narrators recall study habits practiced in high school and thought about whether or not they were helpful now.

Remarks Kristen,

[My] senior year of high school I didn't really do any homework at all, so I'm kind of starting with a blank slate, but like the, I guess, the different thing between here and high school is that they give you the syllabus at the beginning so you know exactly what's going to be happening, so I guess technically, you could plan out your entire semester and what you're gonna do. Umm, which I definitely wasn't used to, I kind of would just do it day by day in high school, so I started doing that . . . I guess the study habits that I really developed were like figuring out what's important, and so I could do stuff ahead of time, like, in high school, I never studied more than a day before a test and I never wrote essays in advance but and I wouldn't say that I have the best study habits now but I've definitely started doing some of that, so. (Kristen, Interview 3, December 19, 2007)

Alejandra sees her tragic flaw as procrastination, something she has carried with her since high school:

Academics, what can you say, they've been okay, I kind of expected them to be hard, but I kind of slacked off this whole semester, so I don't have bad grades, I guess, I have like all Bs and a C, but I could have done better, it's just I like to take naps, and stay up very late, and uhh, habits from high school I haven't got rid of yet. (Alejandra, Interview 3, December 17, 2007)

As Csank and Conway (2004) found, this type of reflection upon personality characteristics, known as trait reflection, is common among women.

Discrepancy between expectation and ensuing experience is the precursor for reflection. Although the women were certainly presented with experiences in which

they could experience surprise, inner discomfort, perplexity, or discontinuity, they did not necessarily convey thoughtful re-examination of experience. To listen to Michelle, for example, was frustrating because she often recounted an activity, but offered no elaboration, no stream-of-consciousness thinking, and no emotion that allowed a listener to catch a glimpse of who she really is. She is a protagonist who cannot publicly construct her story, at least not at this point in her life. Michelle's announcement that she was resigning from the Academy just days after our last interview partly explained, yet partly obscured the difficulty I was having with her incomplete, silent, and selfless text. For example, she describes the essays on her USMA admissions application:

. . . why you wanted to come here, what [are] your strengths, your weaknesses, stuff like that [pause]... I had to write really tiny, 'cause I had a lot to say. We had to handwrite it. It was on, on a big paper application, with like our Social Security number, our name, and these boxes for, I believe three essays [inflection rising]. And we had to write, confine our answers to like one box—no extra paper—so I had to write really small [6-second pause]. (Michelle, Interview 1, June 30, 2007)

The most important phrase in this excerpt is that she "had a lot to say," a statement revealing that she gave consideration and voice to these essays. Yet she selects to tell me instead about the format of the application, even when given the conversational space to elaborate further. It is as if she pantomimed the last interview, presenting what she presumes I want her to say, but closing the curtain when she had the opportunity to continue. Supposing the precipitating circumstances leading to her resignation grew gradually, she did not, or could not, vocalize her discontent even when presented with this forum in which to do so.

According to Belenky et al. (1997), Michelle easily fits the description of a silent knower, living "at the behest of those around them" (p. 134). Yet perhaps her choice to resign from the Academy, a cogent act vis-à-vis the meek language revealed in the transcripts, is a signal that she is making more informed and enlightened personal choices, despite claiming West Point had been the right place for her for so many years. The significance of the following remark became clear only after her decision to leave, when she empathizes with a fellow new cadet who resigns during Cadet Basic Training:

He was in my squad. He really didn't belong here, he didn't feel it was right for him and you could tell it wasn't right for him, umm, he just wasn't happy here. And I'm kinda happy for him that he left 'cause now he can find something else he's passionate about that he wants to do. (Michelle, Interview 2, August 26, 2007)

Summary: Formation of the Episodic Female Bildungsroman

The *bildungsroman*, or the novel of formation (Hirsch, 1979), provides a literary perspective by which to understand the six interview series I conducted for this research. A *bildungsroman* with a female protagonist at the helm emphasizes development of the self in relation with society, as opposed to a linear succession of social integrative action, just as the narrators in the study spoke of connection to their families, peers, and institution. Considered as episodes rather than snippets, the tales told to me clustered around common motifs— that of family legacy, carrying, plebeian, self and other, and reflection.

Elements of Discourse

Everyone has a lexicon from which to select the words used to communicate. Even still, words cannot be detached from their socio-cultural origins and complexity. Says Bakhtin, "a word in the mouth of a particular individual is a product of the living interaction of social forces" (as cited in Clark & Holquist, 1984, p. 220). The process of extracting meaning and shaping identity is necessarily accomplished in concert with others through shared language and cultural frameworks. As Casey (1993) reminds us, "what we select and reject very much depends on who we are, who is speaking to us, what they say, how they say it, where and when we are listening" (p. 7).

The last of my research questions addressed the "what" and "how" elements of story construction. That is, the ways in which students narrate—how they use language and for what purpose—contribute to understanding their meaning of their experiences. As Schiffon (1987) suggests, language is not only sensitive to the contexts in which it occurs, it also "reflects those contexts because it helps to constitute them" (p. 5). A discourse, defined in its broadest sense as in Chapter II, is language used within ideology, the medium of relationships in society. From a micro-perspective, discourse is a "linguistic unit composed of several sentences" (Fromkin & Rodman, 1993, p. 504). There is a continuum between these two diametric definitions, for an individual can only express complex thoughts and ideas that form part of the larger discourse by knowing the smaller increments of a language.

Early in the research stage, long before my sample was selected, I made a decision to transcribe the interviews verbatim; that is, I created a word-for-word reproduction of verbal data, where written words are an exact replication of the audiorecorded words (Poland, 1995), preserving discourse markers, false starts, and other utterances. My goal was to ensure that when I revisited the texts during analysis, I would "hear" my participants through the printed words, just as writers use dialect, bringing me as close to the data as possible (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). At first, I attempted to complete transcription using voice recognition software, but found that it clumsily handled nuances of spoken language and chose to manually transcribe the remainder of the interviews. I hence reverted to a method by which I listened to the digital audiofiles through my computer's speakers as I transcribed talk into a word-processed document. The narratives, while they arguably have lost something in translation, represent as closely as possible the narrators' diction, the distinct use of language and style of expression. In this way, the written form of the protagonists' speech retains a gritty quality similar to the language of realist characters in American literature.

At times, therefore, conveying the elements of the participants' conversations was difficult, although they were linguistically intriguing. In particular, I noticed the vocabulary, particularly the words, phrases, and acronyms sensitive to the institution; and the other features of the language: function words, discourse markers, laughter, pause, and inflection, which the narrators invoked to varying degrees.

Vocabulary

They had a little reception for all the Service Academy kids, which, there were about 65 of us, and from all different academies, and, umm, the president of the, of the college, he's an ex-Marine colonel, and, uhh, he was talking, "well, y'know, the next four or five weeks are gonna be fun for you, 'cause, y'know, you're going to go through a cycle," and I was like, what cycle?—y'know, it was, they didn't brief me on any of it. And, uhh, so, I just kinda jumped in, feet first, and that was it. (Jodie, Interview 1, July 1, 2007)

In the passage above, Jodie describes initial perplexity with vocabulary at her yearlong military preparatory school. West Point, just like the preparatory school and military in general, has its own vocabulary; not surprisingly, by the second and third interviews, participants had integrated many of West Point's expressions into their stories. The narrators have appropriated institutional context words and added them to their stories as if they had always spoken that way. Although the meaning from the following examples may be extracted from context clues, what is salient is how, after only eight weeks, their immersion in the environment has altered their lexical repertoire.

At times, vocabulary that the narrators thought they knew takes on new meaning in the military academy. Kristen, for example, recounts:

. . . on R-Day, we got yelled at once, like, because what you do is like, you always have to go up like, and stand like out on the wall like during Beast, 'cause they have to walk you everywhere, so he was like, "oh, like, get outside, like, meet at this time," but like on R-Day, we didn't know what outside meant, so my roommate was like, oh we have to go outside, so like we walked down the stairways and like went actually like outdoors and we saw like the regimental command sergeant major was right out there and he's like, "what are you doing?" And he started like, yelling at us, so that was really scary [laugh] but like besides that, I did everything right on R-Day. (Kristen, Interview 2, August 25, 2007)

In the example above, the narrator specifically qualifies a new meaning for the familiar word *outside*. Other words and phrases indigenous to West Point simply become entrenched in the narrators' vocabularies. During the second interview series, new words or new associated meanings are rife. For example, "The next time I saw her she was in the transient group, staying in the transient barracks" (Jodie, Interview 2, August 24, 2007). *Transient barracks* are designated rooms, separate from the Corps, where cadets who have resigned or who are involuntarily separated stay until out-processing paperwork is complete.

Alejandra sprained her ankle during Cadet Basic Training, so she also comes to know military vernacular used to describe impaired physical condition: "I went to reconditioning, I didn't like reconditioning at all, 'cause they kinda smoked you, too" (Alejandra, Interview 2, August 26, 2007). Referring to medical personnel, she says, "they put me on profile" (Alejandra, Interview 2, August 26, 2007). Referring to the military system of discerning physical capability, to be *on profile* means that medical orders prevent normal physical training (PT) activities. The occasional soldier exploits this system, looking to shirk responsibility (or *sham*). Soldiers or cadets who are *on profile* report to *sick call*, a daily formation for personnel who require medical attention. Kelly, who experienced vertigo during the summer, an event that she says, "actually completely changed my, umm, Basic Training experience" (Kelly, Interview 2, August 25, 2007), mocks the stereotype:

. . . This wasn't something, like not a shamming thing, 'cause some days I'd have to go to like reconditioning, which is the you know, alternative for PT, where, and several days I spent in sick call and there's always those people you see who have like a different injury every time just every day. So I didn't

want people to think I was "that guy" or the profile ranger. (Kelly, Interview 2, August 25, 2007)

The concept of being *on profile* is transferable, and cadets easily apply it to other situations. In an example her unit's humorous exploits during the summer, says a narrator,

. . . and this other guy got *on talking profile*, where he couldn't talk the whole day 'cause their squad leader didn't want to hear him, so he had to talk in other people's ears and other people had to talk for him, to our squad leader, and it was, it was good times. (Alejandra, Interview 2, August 26, 2007)

The second half (or *second detail*) of Cadet Basic Training involved numerous military exploits and thus was laden with new words, including the ones Alejandra rips through in the following excerpt:

We also got to zero in our rifles and shoot. I got sharpshooter, so uhh, you know, watch out, I might become a sniper one day. Umm, we also went mountain repelling, and we did some convoys, we went out to Buckner, and we umm, then we did a lot of land nav, we did the—I think it was Warrior Force, it was called, umm, where we did a whole day of like, recons, and setting up patrol bases and going out and get some hodgies. (Alejandra, Interview 2, August 26, 2007)

An abbreviated form of the word *reconnaissance*, a *recon* is a gathering of information by exploring an area. In this next passage, Kristen takes what she knows about the word *recon* and applies it to her own actions:

Last weekend me and this other kid kind of took like some *recon* of our barracks and looked up where everybody lives and everything and I typed up this whole big chart of every single person, their roommate, their position, where they lived. (Kristen, Interview 2, August 25, 2007)

As the military is a system of rules and regulations (*regs* in military vernacular), some of the vocabulary deals with the disciplinary process:

During Beast, me and my roommate did a Taps violation accidentally, like we didn't have watches or anything and we were waiting for people to tell us lights out and like it never came, so, someone like opened the door and saw us with the lights on, like, sitting at our desks, and we got in trouble, but. We were supposed to have a company board, but, we didn't have time for it, so we have like five suspended hours, so we can't mess up again. (Joy, Interview 2, August 26, 2007)

A military bugle call, for cadets, the sounding of Taps signifies the end of the day (11:30 p.m.) when all cadets must be in their rooms. At this time, if the overhead light is still on, cadets receive a *Taps violation*. A *company board* is a non-judicial disciplinary hearing that takes place at the company level, with the cadet chain of command and tactical officer chain of command authorized to issue punishment in the form of disciplinary area tours (*hours*) or demerits. Hours are served walking in formation in the company area on weekends; suspended hours are not served as long as the cadet does not receive additional hours or demerits.

One last military term, actually a military slang acronym that worked its way into the narrators' discussions, usually gets a reaction of this kind:

. . . and the BCGs really like, sucked, I hated BCGs, and it's funny to see everyone take off those BCGs for A-Day Parade, and you don't recognize anyone anymore, and you're like, who are you? (Alejandra, Interview 2, August 26, 2007)

BCGs are slang for military-issued eyeglasses, the abbreviation derived from the nomer Birth Control Glasses, as they are so unattractive as to repel would-be paramours.

In addition, Jodie not only appropriates words, but also recognizes the use of military metaphors in her description of laundry duty during Reorganization Week:

We delivered our laundry—we completed the mission—we turned around to come back and that's when we all got snagged, 'cause I was walking in front, and when there's, when you're walking single file and there's people yelling, you can't really tell that the person behind you is still right behind you, so I got about five steps and realized my battle buddy, quote unquote, was not behind me, and one of the sergeants started screaming at me because I hadn't stopped for her. (Jodie, Interview 2, August 24, 2007)

One word arose repeatedly: scramble. Scrambling is a practice in which, after controlling for "several observable characteristics such as gender, race, recruited athlete, and measures of prior performance and behavior" (Lyle, 2007, p. 290), officials randomly assign students to one of 36 companies in the Corps of Cadets. As part of a company, cadets from all four classes reside together in a designated area of the barracks. The official term for "scrambling" is the Leader Distribution Plan, implemented by USMA officials to maintain a military leader-subordinate relationship among the classes and to prevent inevitable friendships that developed among upperclassmen from interfering with those relationships ("Preparing for West Point's Third Century," 1991). It is what Lyle (2007) terms a "common shock," because it influences the outcomes of everyone in the group. Because the decision to scramble originates in the "big brass" echelons of the chain of command, it seems an arbitrary practice (in actuality, a computer program produces the assignment—see Lyle, 2007), which has significant repercussions for how cadets will experience the Academy. They have no input on what company they will join or who will be in that company with them. In a real sense, they are confronted by the fact that "not only

does 'Uncle Sam' issue a uniform and a 'tight haircut,' but he also issues peers and role models" (Lyle, 2007, p. 292). In an example of how it affected one participant, Michelle relays, "I was scrambled into a new company, umm, because I'm Corps Squad softball and I didn't know a lot of the people there, so I kind of got yelled at a lot for not knowing who's a sergeant and who's a lieutenant" (Michelle, Interview 2, August 26, 2007). She clarifies the reason for the change in company—her athlete status—and suffers through punitive measures as a result.

Scrambling results in discordant feelings. Rumors of scrambling spread quickly, receiving criticism from cadets. Says Jodie,

. . . we're all really upset, the whole class, just like the yuks were last year, about having to scramble. We're scrambling two times: at the end of the year, and when we go to Buckner, we scramble end of Buckner, so we'll be with a whole new company, people, for Buckner, go to Buckner, and, all the yuks, and all the upperclassmen, say that Buckner is where you really form your, like, some of your tightest friends, 'cause you, I mean . . . it's not like plebe life where you're not ever allowed to talk, but Buckner, it's pretty much y'know, you're out in the field for like a day and half with nothing to do, so, you scramble into Buckner, you go through Buckner, then you scramble out of Buckner into completely new companies, meet completely new people for your academic year and then you stay there for the rest of your time at the Academy. But even, even then, they're talking about scrambling my class our senior year, our Firstie year, again, because they're creating, they're expanding the Corps, and they're creating an I Company, and you need chain of command members, for this, for all these new companies, so they're talking about scrambling us yet again for our Firstie year. So we're kind of upset, 'cause it's like how are you supposed to build that bond? (Jodie, Interview 3, December 18, 2007)

Other Linguistic Elements

While the general public often discounts certain linguistic elements as needless or meaningless, others have pointed to their importance as markers of one's cultural stance and identity (Andersen, 2000; Fox Tree, 2007; Groom & Pennebaker,

2002; Taylor & Mendoza-Denton, 2005). As Groom and Pennebaker (2002) observe, "It is ironic that the parts of speech that have no intrinsic meaning say the most about us," (p. 619). By elaborating on these elements, my aim is to demonstrate that the narrators use a variety of linguistic resources, not just vocabulary, that construct the meaning of their interactions with self, other, and environment.

Posits Fox Tree (2007), the stigma attached to these words may arise because they are products of spontaneous speech. Moreover, several of the elements I have included here—discourse markers, pause, and rising inflection—are culturally regarded as "powerless language" and have an effect on persuasion (Holtgraves & Lasky, 1999, p. 196). That is, when speakers use "powerless language," they are perceived as less competent and assertive. Indeed, for instance, the pauses and rising inflections in Joy's first interview likely contributed to my qualms if she would persist through the first semester, as I wrote in my post-interview notes: "strikes me as timid, unfamiliar with what she's about to begin." For example, when she talks about her decision to attend, she says:

Yeah, umm, it was, I didn't, I never wanted to go to an Academy till like, the end of my junior year, so kinda later than most people. Umm, and usually, I was just thinking like, or before, I was thinking ROTC, and like a scholarship and all that, but like, umm, a bunch of my friends—in, uhh, JR, in JROTC, too, and like a bunch of my friends applied to the academies so I thought I should too, 'cause, yeah, umm. And uhh, what made me decide on an academy [inflection rising]—I guess like I, since I always wanted to go in the military, I figured like, might as well go for it [laugh]. I dunno. Hopefully I won't regret it. Umm, I [pause], I think, I'm not sure what I want to study [inflection rising] at the Academy, everyone's always asked me that. But, umm, I dunno, I think, [haltingly] I was thinking about like helicopters, would be cool. Flying helicopters around, but really I, it's all open. I have no idea, I have no idea [long hesitation]. (Joy, Interview 1, July 1, 2007)

During the subsequent interviews and repeated listenings of her audiorecordings, I came to understand that much of Joy's tentativeness is due to her position as a received knower (Belenky et al., 1997). As a young received knower, she has "a literal faith that [she] and [her] friends share exactly the same thoughts and experiences" (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 38). In the excerpt above, for example, not only does she apply to the academy when her friends do, but when she thinks about choosing a major, she does so because other people ask her. Although she is not forever powerless and unassertive, at this crossroads, her speech reflects that things are "never consciously ambivalent . . . it is all or nothing" with her (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 41), as in the case when she theorizes:

Umm, I dunno, I'm really nervous, 'cause, like, from what I hear, you really love it or you hate it. And for the most part like, well, Beast, like you hate it, but, overall, four years, like you really love it or you hate it. And I'm just hoping [pause] that I don't hate it. (Joy, Interview 1, July 1, 2007)

Function words. Function words are grammatical words including conjunctions, prepositions, transitions, and articles (Fromkin & Rodman, 1993). Differing from nouns, verbs, and adjectives, referred to as content words, function words form the linguistic 'glue' that hold content words together" (Groom & Pennebaker, 2002, p. 618). Over time, Groom and Pennebaker (2002) indicate that function words are more reliable in someone's conversational pattern than content words; that is, people are more consistent in how they talk than in what they say. The narrators in this study often naturally abbreviate, or "clip," function words into shortened versions of the original word that still convey original meaning. Thus, *because* was often clipped to *'cause*; *going to* clipped to *gonna*; *kind of* clipped to

kinda; *you know* clipped to *y'know*; and occasionally, *don't know* clipped to *dunno*.

These subtractive word formations are preserved in these findings as they occurred in the original narratives so that both the narrators' cultures and their speaker-audience relationships are preserved.

Discourse markers. Discourse markers (DMs) are words "whose function it is to organize the flow of talk and manage its interactivity" (Thornbury & Slade, 2006). With regard to gender, Taylor and Mendoza-Denton (2005) highlight that college women use more discourse markers than college men, suggesting that "discourse markers might mean that women were simply more attuned to subtle communicative aspects of the interaction, . . . and used DMs as a marker of stance" (p. 82). Discourse markers are a varied lot; Schiffon (1987) alone classifies *oh*, *well*, *and*, *but*, *or*, *so*, *because*, *now*, *then*, *you know*, and *I mean* as discourse markers, even recognizing that the evolving nature of language and scholars' differing interpretations beget new discourse markers all the time. More recently, scholars have devoted considerable attention to *like* (Andersen, 2000; Fox Tree, 2007; Romaine & Lange, 1991; Tannen, 1986). As I completed the transcriptions, I became strikingly aware of three particular discourse markers embedded in the speech patterns of the narrators: *like*, *umm*, and *you know*. Kristen's speech, for example, is glaringly full of the discourse marker *like*. For example:

Umm, I'm like, I'm really excited, but right now I'm mostly nervous just 'cause it's so close. But like, but like what I'm most nervous about, I think, is just kind of like when I have to like do stuff like singled out. Like I don't mind having to do like hard stuff like when we're all like working together, whatever. But I mean like I know it's gonna happen but I'm not really looking forward to like being singled out in front of other people, but like I think it's gonna be one of those things that like while you're going through it like

you're so like wrapped up in it that you're like, "oh man, like this is tough," but you just like go through. (Kristen, Interview 1, June 29, 2007)

So conspicuous was her use of *like* that I quantified its use: in her first interview, *like* represented 10% of her vocabulary; in the second interview, 8%; and in the third, 6%. By speech standards, this repetition is tremendous (Thornbury & Slade, 2006). While the use of *like* may popularly thought of as simply a hallmark of youth (Fox Tree, 2007), morphologically, *like* is a signal that the relation between the utterance and the underlying thought is not one-to-one (Andersen, 2000). That is, *like* is an approximator, a way to construct conversation loosely, and an indicator that what is being said is not exactly what is meant (Fox Tree, 2007). For instance, consider how Kelly uses *like* in the retelling of her Reception Day experience:

But we got there and that was definitely one of those feelings that you'll never have again in your life, *like* the anticipation and just *like* probably 80% of me was *like*, I just wanna, I wanna get this over with, because I've been waiting so long up to that point and just anticipating. And then there's 20% of me that was *like*, oh my gosh, mom, don't leave me [laugh]. (Kelly, Interview 2, August 25, 2007)

Not able to replicate the feeling again in experience ("one of those feelings that you'll never have again in your life"), in conversation, she conveys this meaning by adding *like* to anticipation. That is, she may anticipate again, but future anticipation will not compare to that which she felt the morning of July 2, 2007. She also approximates her commitment at that moment juxtaposed with inner pangs of panic ("*like* probably 80%"; "*like*, I just wanna"; "*like*, oh my gosh, mom, don't leave me").

Additionally, Tannen (1986) holds that the word *like* following a form of the verb *to be* functions as an introducer of conversational constructed dialogue, taking

the place of *say* and *tell* in more formal literary narratives. For example, consider *like* in this constructed dialogue: "they're *like*, oh, okay, wow, and they're *like*, you can go," (Kristen, Interview 2, August 25, 2007), contrasted with: "he said, you two, come over here" (Jodie, Interview 2, August 24, 2007). Both are examples of constructed dialogue, which "creates involvement [and] makes it possible for listeners to come closer to imagining the recounted action or speech rather than hearing about it" (Romaine & Lange, 1991, p. 267). The use of *like* in the first example, however, recaptures the incident, but also explores the narrator's interpretation of her impression on upper class cadets, an egocentric approximation. The second example, without *like*, is less an approximation of emotion, more a replication of the direct order that Jodie probably experienced.

Just as *like* occurs in spontaneous talk, so, too, does the discourse marker *umm*. Fox Tree (2007) suggests that *umm* is predictive of an upcoming delay in speech production, possibly of production trouble, and occasionally functions as an indicator of discourse newness. *Umm* is an example of a filler, a "linguistic device used to fill momentary hesitation occasioned by the demands of real-time processing pressure" (Thornbury & Slade, 2006, p. 56). Consider this excerpt from one of the second interviews, in which the narrator describes table duties:

. . . there's a cold beverage corporal, a hot beverage corporal, and the gunner and each of the *umm*, each person pours beverages or announces the meals *umm*, gets coffee, soup, or whatever and we have to pass the food in a certain pattern diagonally across the table, *umm*, starting on one end and we have to, oh yeah, we have to announce the dessert and cut the dessert exactly for how many people want it, and it has to be inspected, but at Corps Squad tables, you don't have to do any of that. *Umm*, you just basically take what you want, eat as fast as you can, and eat some more. (Michelle, Interview 2, August 26, 2007)

The use of *umm* fills the time it takes for the newly-encountered table duties to play out in her mind and then explain them to me, indicative that table duties are a cumbersome practice with which this transitioning cadet is still gaining familiarity. The procedure does not "roll off the tongue" easily. This lack of fluency is pronounced more by the fact that Michelle, also a varsity athlete, sits at designated tables during the lunch period, where table duties are not required. The last *umm* reflects this difference, and the remainder of talk flows quickly. Further, consider the use of *umm* in this passage:

And, *umm*, that was the first time where I've, I've ever like, really [accented] pushed myself and done something I absolutely hated but I became so much better as a result of it. And so, *umm*, same with push-ups, I mean when I started doing push-ups last ye--, *umm*, like, end of my sophomore year, when I started thinking about the military for sure, I could do like seven and then I'd have to stop. (Kelly, Interview 1, June 30, 2007)

You know, which as aforementioned, the narrators often clipped to *y'know*, is also a discourse marker that emerges in the transcripts. Like *umm*, it may be a device to avoid a pause when speech production is troublesome, but *you know* can also be an invitation to fill out a narrator's meaning and to check for understanding as a way of connecting with listeners (Fox Tree, 2007). Schiffon (1987) suggests that *you know/y'know* not only marks what knowledge speaker and listener share, but also marks what things are generally known. In the following passage, Alejandra uses *you know* twice to create shared understanding of what it means to be in a "chill" company and what it means to occupy the role of first sergeant, signifying the remembrance of some unpleasant interaction with that particular cadet:

I like my company, umm, like I said during my last interview, I thought that they'd be chill, and they are pretty chill, you know, the first sergeant has to be, you know, the biggest meanie I guess in the whole company, but other than that, I didn't really have problems with any upperclassmen. (Alejandra, Interview 3, December 17, 2007)

Laughter. Listening to my participants, then listening as I transcribed their audio files, I unexpectedly met laughter as a regular part of their speech patterns. Instead of a response to a funny situation, in many cases, laughter takes on alternative meanings such as those described by Giles and Oxford (1970): ignorance, anxiety, apology, or derision. First, in a critical situation Kristen does not seem to fully comprehend, she describes:

. . . then when we got back from Thanksgiving, I didn't feel good on Monday, so I went to the doctor on Tuesday and they gave me cough medicine and said to come back if I still felt sick so I came back on Wednesday and I, they did my blood test, and I have mono, so for the whole last month of the semester [laugh], I haven't been to classes, since before Thanksgiving, so, I've just been hanging out in my room a lot. (Kristen, Interview 3, December 19, 2007)

Mononucleosis is clearly not a comic event, nor is the consequence that Kristen has to miss classes for a month in a curricular setting where attendance is mandatory and the failure of courses, even due to illness, has serious repercussions. Yet she is casual about the situation. As she later relays in the interview, she would likely attend summer school to make up the courses she had to drop, a four-week session that takes the place of cadets' only vacation time during the summer. Granted, she may be masking apprehension about the situation, but nonetheless, her story conveys unawareness. Next, as an example of anxiety, Kelly uses laughter in a re-

creation of a tense moment when she stood as a cadet in front of her family during the Reception Day parade, roughly eight hours after she told them good-bye:

. . . My mom actually got a spot like right in the front with my grandpa and my sister, right where our company stopped, just by sheer chance, it was like exactly where our company stopped, and I could see them and it was just like [pause] absolutely horrible to see them again, but I know it made my mom feel a lot better, like a hundred thousand times better, so I was happy in that sense, but for me I was like, this is the worst thing [pause] ever [laugh]. 'Cause it's my mom seeing me. . . . So it was actually a relief to march on past them, 'cause you can't show any emotion. The military bearing was like—oh, this really is a challenge [laugh]. (Kelly, Interview 2, August 25, 2007)

She releases the anxiety-riddled situation—her challenge to maintain military bearing—through a spontaneous laugh, even weeks after the event has occurred, as well as uses laughter to comment on ironic difference of opinion between her mother and herself. Third, apologetic laughter helps someone vindicate oneself from blame as an attempt to excuse a particular behavior, inducing the listener to experience the behavior or incident as funny. Says Joy:

. . . Six week grades came around, I, I worked really hard the first six weeks, like, I ended up having like a 3.8 GPA, but I got really bored [laugh] like I was, I was always studying, I actually like made use of all my free time to do work and like it kinda got depressing, so I just like kinda slacked off a little bit, and, and it shows, but I'm more happy now, so [laugh]. (Joy, Interview 3, December 17, 2007)

"Working hard," however she defines it, produces a high GPA at the six-week mark, an academically desirable outcome. The laughs occur, however, when she looks for an excuse to consciously adopt less productive study habits that "show," one presumes, in her final grades. Embarrassed by her poorer performance towards the end of the semester, she wants her listener to understand, contrary to the norm,

that her happiness is being sacrificed by rigorous studying and uses laughter to excuse her behavior. Finally, as an example of derision, Alejandra muses:

I'm so glad that I moved from the country . . . 'cause if I still went to the county school I would have never gone to West Point, I would have never thought about the military, I would have probably just worked on a farm or something [laughs]. (Alejandra, Interview 1, July 1, 2007)

Here her laughter is directed at the agrarian community she lived in early in her childhood, believing that her departure had everything to do with where she is today. To see herself as more worldly, she must set herself apart from and deride another lifestyle, attempting a laugh to garner agreement towards her negative connotation.

In the narratives, laughter is integral in social interactions. The narrators punctuate their stories with the device, not because a situation is necessarily humorous, but because they are ignorant, anxious, apologetic, or derisive. What makes laughter different from other speech fillers, like discourse markers and pauses, is that the narrators display a heightened consciousness of their tendency to laugh or smile, even when inappropriate. Joy, in particular, mentions others' reactions to her laughter: "all through Beast, I always got in trouble for smiling or laughing and like, I, I got actually like disciplined for, like, me and my roommate, 'cause we, my squad leader said we were having too much fun at Beast" (Joy, Interview 2, August 26, 2007). Of her combatives course, she also remarks, "I think like my teachers thought I didn't really take it seriously 'cause I would always like laugh and stuff" (Joy, Interview 3, December 17, 2007). Although aware of the social

consequences of her misplaced laughter, Joy does not convey that she has desire to change this pattern.

Pause and inflection. I indicated noticeable pauses in speech and instances of rising inflection or tone changes in the text. Pauses, or small silences, marked occasions where, most often, participants were formulating thoughts. To a lesser degree, pauses conveyed drama. They occurred both intrasententially (within sentences) and intersententially (between sentences). Alejandra, while contrasting the admissions processes of USMA and other institutions, uses an intersential pause before she relays another thought:

It was a lot harder than applying to any old college and stuff like that. [Pause] But those were the hardest things. And umm, like I went to do the ROTC, umm, scholarship forms, all I had to do I just had to fill out like one piece of paper. (Alejandra, Interview 1, July 1, 2007)

As an example of dramatic pause, Kelly shares her memory of firing a howitzer during SLS, "And that was, like it gave me this like huge adrenaline rush, and I was like, "this is [pause] so cool." It's nothing like we've ever done—I've ever done before" (Kelly, Interview 1, June 30, 2007). Her pause emphasizes the significance of the event for her—an affirmation to herself that she could enjoy participating in a decidedly military moment, the opportunity to re-create the thrilling feeling as she tells the story more than a year after the event occurred.

The participants often ended statements with rising inflection, implying a question, even at the end of a declarative phrase. Tannen (1990) found that such vocalizations are characteristic of feminine speech patterns. This tentativeness may either indicate uncertainty or keep conversation open, or both (Spender, 1984). Joy

employs both inflection changes and pause as she contemplates the many leaders who have undergone the experience she is about to begin:

. . . It's kind of intimidating, too, 'cause, it's, like, it's so old here. And like, I guess, some of the most important people have been here, went through the same thing I'm about to go through... I guess it's a lot like [pause] I have a lot to live up to [inflection rising]. (Joy, Interview 1, July 1, 2007)

In this example, the pause represents not only the time it takes for her to find the words to continue, but the space she is about to occupy as a cadet, space previously occupied by personalities writ large on the pages of American history. Her rising inflection offers a hint of doubt: is she worthy to walk these famous hallowed grounds? It is a weighty notion. Yet she also keeps the conversation flowing, as if she implores her listener to endorse her cadet candidacy, to back USMA's offer of admission.

Summary: Elements of Discourse

In this section, I have tried to explain the salient features of the narrators' discourse, including vocabulary, function words, discourse markers, laughter, pause, and inflection. Cursorily, these elements may seem pedantic. However, in order to draw conclusions about the meaning of their transition to college, even the space between students' words is important.

Summary: Findings

In this chapter, I began with brief background descriptions of the six study participants. Using illustrative selections from the narratives, I explained how together, the narratives form an example of an episodic female *bildungsroman*, distinct scenes from multiple protagonists that revolve around common motifs. Last,

I considered how certain elements of discourse, including vocabulary and linguistic features, is informative of the women's identity and stance. Throughout this chapter, I have referred to the informants from my theoretical framework, including the narrative connections to the identity, transition to college, meaning making, and reflection. The narrative excerpts and analysis have set the stage for conclusions and recommendations, presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore identity and self-reflection during the transition to college using a qualitative narrative design. As such, I examined the ways individual women students at West Point make meanings of their experiences in real time, while those experiences are happening. The intent was to show how their reflections and interpretations are essential to understanding and enhancing women's transition to the first year of college. In light of the findings I presented in the preceding chapter and the theories presented in Chapter II, in this concluding chapter, I offer summary, reflections and conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further research.

Summary of Findings

My broad and divergent framework is based on identity theories set forth by Bakhtin (1981) and Gee (2001); transition to college theories, including metaphors employed by Schlossberg (1989), Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), and Chickering and Reisser (1993); and educational reflection theories espoused by Schön (1983) then expanded by Boud et al. (1985) and Boud et al. (1993). The emphasis on language by Bakhtin (1981) and Gee (2001) creates an opportunity to examine how the narrators' stories used vocabulary and oft-overlooked features of language to signal stance within their educational milieu.

The preceding chapter draws extensively from eighteen interviews conducted with six research participants during their first semester as cadets at the United States Military Academy. The six young women, aged 18 or 19, hail from geographically diverse regions of the United States. Through their stories, I have begun to understand the meaning they associate with their decision to attend West Point and that they ascribe to their initial student experiences. Borrowing the terms episodic female *bildungsroman* from literary genre, I have demonstrated how distinct scenes revolving around common motifs collectively form a portrayal of becoming (Hirsch, 1979). In a *bildungsroman*, the protagonist leaves home to become "his own man" in a challenging urban location. Similarly, these women left their hometowns, often with doubts of others echoing in their minds, to attend West Point. Further, the women tell of occasions in which they returned home after beginning college, comparing themselves to former lifestyles, often feeling a bit out-of-sorts in their original communities. In efforts of acclimation, these women test previous ways of making meaning, some of which are upheld, some rejected, in light of their new ensemble of characters. Another characteristic of the *bildungsroman* is a fatherless protagonist, a pattern that unexpectedly occurs in these women's stories: two women have definitive ruptures in the father-daughter relationship (Alejandra through death; Kelly through divorce); two others rarely mention their fathers at all (Kristen and Michelle). Just as in the female *bildungsroman*, in which a heroine's identity is established through the development of relationships rather than formal education, the message within these stories is that these women prioritize relationships with their social networks. Epistemologically, these women

may have varying degrees of uncontested perspectives, but their common denominator is that they come to their knowledge through their interactions with others (Belenky et al., 1997).

Five motifs emerge from the analysis: family legacy, carrying, a plebeian existence, self and other, and reflection. First, when they spoke of their decision to attend West Point, most of these women described a family legacy of military service, of which they were aware at a young age. They see themselves as fitting within a pattern already established by members of their families. Second, these women carry tangibles and intangibles. They are very intentional about the material items they took with them to West Point, including their cherished selected civilian clothes. The "stuff" they carry represents personal styles of expression, in contrast to the military ethos of the institution, which conceals uniqueness. As the letters from friends and family they so crave attest, in addition, they carry an attachment to home, manifested in recurring bouts of homesickness, as well as a fear of physical sickness, infirmity that could jeopardize their status as soldiers and send them back home, unfulfilled.

Third, these women dwell upon their status as plebes, especially as their relationships with others are complicated by the presence of institutional rules. As a result, they are resigned to listening and watching upperclass cadets, acting as participant-observers in their own socio-educational settings, internally keeping score of which characteristics exemplify good and respected upperclass students, and which do not. Fourth, these women function within multiple spheres of self and other. They are military; friends, family, and the proverbial "regular college" are

civilian. As plebes, their relationships are manifested in relation to upperclass cadets, some who act as antagonists and some as organizational insiders. As women, they call themselves "female cadets" and recognize that being a woman has implications for their West Point experience. Finally, in describing rituals, galvanizing common events, and company personalities, they demonstrate the power of unit cohesion and institutional tradition, even as they may find themselves unaffected by these experiences, preferring privacy instead.

Fifth, events during the narrators' first semester sometimes prompted reflection, understood as a process in which a person recaptures an experience, attends to the feelings associated with that event, and places it in the context of current knowledge (Boud et al., 1985). Reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983) did not necessarily occur in the original event, when the women were presented with experiences in which they could experience surprise, inner discomfort, perplexity, or discontinuity, nor did the reflection occur during the action of re-telling of the story.

Lastly, the preceding chapter includes an analysis of the narrators' salient linguistic elements: the vocabulary, particularly the words, phrases, and acronyms indicative of the institution; and the other features of the language: function words, discourse markers, laughter, pause, and inflection that the narrators invoked to varying degrees. These features of language are clues to narrators' stance and identity. *Like* approximates language to thoughts and experience, and serves a substitute for "say" and "tell" in spontaneous conversational constructed dialogue. *Umm* indicates a cognitive delay and the unfamiliarity with a new discourse, very much at play for these women in a new setting. *You know* indicates shared

knowledge (Fox Tree, 2007; Schiffon, 1987). The narrators punctuate their stories with laughter, not because a situation is necessarily humorous, but because they are ignorant, anxious, apologetic, or derisive. Pauses convey cognitive processing and to a lesser extent, drama. Inflection can convey tentativeness, and it can also function to keep the conversational relationship open.

Educational Reflections and Conclusions

Aware of the applicability of genre of *bildungsroman* during the data analysis phase, I concurrently recognize that drawing comparisons between the real and the fictional is thorny. Admittedly, purposeful authors mastermind the character development, action, conflict, and denouement in novels, even the semi-autobiographical *bildungsroman*. But as author Tim O'Brien (1990) blurs truth and fiction in his Vietnam masterpiece *The Things They Carried*, he implores, "it's not a game. It's a form" (p. 179). Professional authors may not have produced these narratives, but the individuals reconstructing events, impressions, and feelings do so purposefully. As examples, Alejandra creates an image of her boyfriend as uneducated and unsophisticated; Kristen portrays her parents as clueless to her admissions exploits; Joy describes the studious life as depressing before slacking off by design. As McDrury and Alterio (2003) remark,

[s]torytelling is a uniquely human experience that enables us to convey through the language of words, aspects of ourselves and others, and the worlds, real or imagined, that we inhabit. Stories enable us to come to know these worlds and our place in them given that we are all, to some degree, constituted by stories: stories about ourselves, our families, friends and colleagues, our communities, our cultures, our place in history. (p. 31)

"What stories can do, I guess, is make things present," writes O'Brien (1990, p. 179). The past, the sum of the stories we tell, is not only filtered through the lens of the present, but it is what makes us part of the present. Remarks Grumet (1991), "We are, at least partially, constituted by the stories we tell to others and to ourselves about experience" (p. 69).

Relational Identity within Episodes of Women's Development

Nonetheless, using the *bildungsroman* genre to scaffold the stories of college students is advantageous in many respects. First, the humanistic ideology of the *bildungsroman* upholds the self as capable of choice and change, an innate entity shaped by cultural discourse and social experience (Midalia, 1996). This developmental and psychological focus on the coherent self underpins the predominant framework of research on college student identity (e.g., Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kohlberg, 1984; Perry, 1970). The *bildungsroman* further concerns how identity is affected by a complex interplay between psychological and social influences (Abel, Hirsch, & Langland, 1983), a precursor to Gee's (2001) identity framework, which emphasizes that individual identity is formed through dialogic interactions with others. Next, the society of the generic *bildungsroman* is a close parallel to archetypal military settings, whereby in submitting to a hierarchical culture, the youthful hero contemplates identity in a warrior ethos. Well-known *bildungsroman* spun from this plot include the war novels *From Here to Eternity* (Jones, 1951) and *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Remarque, 1929).

Researching further into *bildungsroman* criticism, potential parallels arise between the plots of female *bildungsroman* and the women's narratives I had

collected. Essentially, literary critics object that the customary developmental process is rigidly autonomous and separate (Abel et al., 1983; Hovet, 1990; Selinger, 1999), that society is too subsuming at individuals' expense (Fraiman, 1993), that the most important stage of a life history is youth (Abel et al., 1983; Midalia, 1996); and that recurring metaphors ("quest" and "sight") imply searching for one infallible truth (Hovet, 1990). Aptly, the stories I collected through this research resemble the female *bildungsroman*, in which "the heroine's developmental path is more conflicted, less direct: separation tugs against the longing for fusion and the heroine encounters the conviction that identity resides in . . . relationships" (Abel et al., 1983, p. 11). Exploring the motifs and the narrators' language, I appreciate the explanatory power of the female *bildungsroman* genre as a guide to the attention these women give to governing relationships. Comparably, Johnstone (1993) has found that "mainstream" American women tell stories about relationships: interactions within communities are powerful motivators to narrate. Moreover, predominant use of "constructed dialogue" or reported speech helped these women establish rapport between themselves as storytellers and me as listener (Tannen, 1986).

Quite noticeably, the women spoke only cursorily about academic life. Just as formal education settings have little to do with a heroine's development in a *bildungsroman*, the women's stories of the first week specifically and of the first semester later on had little to do with classroom learning. When they mention their courses, the women discuss grade-point-averages, the hours of homework they have, how much they dislike this or that subject, and perhaps describe a study habit or

two, but there are no examples of expanding intellectual skills or immersing oneself in acquiring disciplinary knowledge. This finding echoes recent research by Clydesdale (2007), who found that teenaged first-year college students resist broadening themselves intellectually. Further, when instructors are mentioned at all, they are part of the social network:

I really like the relationship you have with your teacher. They understand your life, and then they know you, they know you by name, you know, you see them walking down the street, they know who you are, and I like that, being able to email them on a day-to-day basis, say hey, I need to come in for some extra instruction, and they understand. (Jodie, Interview 3, December 18, 2007)

The only course that received more than a passing glance was combatives, the required physical education course for women in their first semester at USMA. It is a class about relationships, albeit antagonistic ones. Kelly describes:

At the beginning, you just hate every day of it, or at least, I did and most of the girls in my class, because you learn how to take hits and punch other people and at least, I'm not violent by nature [laugh], so it was the first time I'd ever like learned to punch someone let alone take a hit. And in the middle of the class we had something called the panic attack drill where you just stand there in the center without any gear on and you just take hits from other people, learning to block [laugh], and you can't hit back, and then at the end of the course, she has something called the gauntlet and you have five attackers coming at you, with no gear on, and you cannot, or you can hit back, but, they definitely have the gear on and so they [laugh] have the advantage, and that includes some of the grappling and ground work as well (Kelly, Interview 3, December 15, 2007)

Thus, instead of creating academic selves, when given the opportunity to talk *carte blanche* about their experiences during the first semester of college, the women abide by their relational identities. This finding supports that of Belenky et al.

(1997), who in their interviews with 153 diverse women, determined that women's most valuable lessons are not derived through formal education, but in relationships and community involvement. Even in the most austere military school environment, the women in this study seek meaning and clarification of identity beyond formal classroom settings, most concerned instead with their networks of relationships.

Moreover, the women's attention on external factors may be additionally credited to the fact that their purported source of self-knowledge is lodged in others, a tendency defined by Belenky et al. (1997) for silent and received knowers, and one that is just beginning to be challenged for subjective knowers. They are learning by listening to parents, friends, instructors, and, in this institutional context, tactical officers and noncommissioned officers, and upperclass cadets. That they rely on what others say about themselves to construct their own stories is thus not surprising. Even in decision-making, women would respond to others' beckoning; for example, "so he asked me if I wanted to join that, even though I've never played before in my life, I'm like, okay. So now I'm like on the racquetball team" (Alejandra, Interview 2, August 26, 2007). In addition, when a narrator used reported speech, it often favorably portrayed herself, signifying that these women hear what they want to hear, possibly indicative of self-reporting bias. Within their current meaning-making structures, these women may simply believe that truth comes from others and they have little confidence in their ability to defend their own successes, as well as disclose shortcomings.

Moreover, as a function of their institutional identity as plebes, the women are often resigned to situations of compulsory silence, where they have little option

but to focus on listening. The design of the Fourth Class system is based on fundamental military principles of following first, leading later. It is a dualistic system; thus, if participants begin to think subjectively about its elements, they are simultaneously constrained by its rules. In becoming critical observers of their communities, they develop some valuable insights about the purpose and practice of leadership, but know of very few rank-free outlets whereby to voice these observations. Team leaders, sophomores just a year beyond these students in class standing, ideally serve as guideposts in one-to-one relationships with plebes, but mired in their own activities, may not have the time, inclination, nor maturity to facilitate these reflections—and certainly, a team leader could be the primary constituent of a plebe's criticism.

Occasionally, women were presented with situations in which they had to prioritize relationships. Kelly turns her roommate in for violation of an Honor Code offense, jeopardizing her connections with her roommate and members in her company. She approaches the situation with much caution, seeking counsel in a trusted upperclass cadet before committing to "the harder right"; after all, for often, "to take a stand against others means to isolate herself socially" (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 65). She has a foil in Alejandra, who chooses not to turn in her roommate for an offense; instead she talks around the subject with an upperclass cadet in her company, hoping he will understand her insinuations. Moreover, Joy engages in acts of rebellion and Kristen prefers privacy to congregation; such actions are representative of prioritizing self over other. These are stories of incidents that

violate social norms resulting in protagonists' discordant feelings, a pattern Johnstone (1993) observes is common among women's storytelling.

These participants, in sum, reveal how all of Gee's (2001) identities are concurrently mixed within the self. For these women, their biological sex (Nature-identity); their plebeian existence (Institutional-identity); their choices whether or not to display the traits emblematic of model friends, girlfriends, students, and children (Discursive-identity); and ebb-and-flow affiliation with their units, the Corps, and the Long Gray Line (Affinity-identity) coincide into these complex portraits. Their meaning-making perspectives, resembling silent, received, and subjective knowers (Belenky et al., 1997), also seem influential to both how they perceive and interact within their community as well as how they see themselves. After all, according to Bakhtin, "it is only in a relationship to the other that the self can be defined" (Casey, 1993).

Transition to College in Episodes of Women's Development

Moreover, framing these narratives as *bildungsroman* allows for the metaphors explaining transition to college to work within a literary genre "that oscillate[s] between [being] concerned with the integration of the hero into society or . . . regards the hero as forever alienated" (Selinger, 1999, p. 38). In Chapter II, I highlighted three common transition metaphors: that of displacement and resulting need to belong somewhere, as espoused in Schlossberg (1989); of culture shock, referred to in student development literature by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) and in related disciplines by Menninger (1975) and Louis (1980); and of task, symbolized in competency-laden identity theories such as Chickering and Reisser (1993). While

the reported stories bear some similarity to these metaphors, in the end, they are somewhat unsatisfactory to explain how these women approach transition to college. Displacement implies shifting away from a natural environment; however, the study participants conveyed that they were in the right place, by expressing that they were continuing their family legacy, meeting a desire to serve, and satisfying goals for their future. In addition, the way in which these narrators interwove the decision to attend West Point into their stories suggests that the transition started long before they arrived for Reception Day. For all but one, serious consideration occurred around the sophomore year of high school. The admissions process, no doubt, with its physical fitness test, congressional nomination interviews, essays about leadership and service, are part of the transition process to get them thinking if this is the right place for them. If anything, they welcome displacement in the sense that four years at West Point would ultimately give them an opportunity to travel and move around the world. Half of the group had spent a week here the summer before their senior year of high school; others, in preparation, had sought out media that would give them a vicarious look at the West Point lifestyle. Prior to arrival, all of them sought advice from "more capable peers," particularly other women who had been through similar military experiences. Because these young women had already cultivated a relationship with their institution and the lifestyle it entails, the notion that they somehow were out-of-place during the first semester is not entirely correct.

Similarly, the transition to college is not necessarily a culture shock, because the women have a good sense of what life will be like during the summer training

and the first semester. Coupled with that, these women spend considerable time maintaining exterior relationships that existed prior to West Point, with mothers, sisters, boyfriends, friends from high school, and other important adults. During Reorganization Week, when these students regain access to technology, including cellular telephones and wireless networks, they re-establish communication with high school friends and relatives. Maintaining those connections mitigates initial "shock" of the first weeks. Recalls one narrator, "I was kind of relieved, because it was the first time we had our laptops, and I was like, 'oh my gosh, we have computers!' I was like, 'how could this week be bad?'" (Kelly, Interview 2, August 25, 2007). Moreover, the ease at which they appropriate colloquialisms, military metaphors, and terminology into their stories signifies that acclimation is occurring; of course, the requirement that they master "plebe knowledge" may contribute to the rapid incorporation of these words. The narrators quickly grasped the use and meaning of the word *scramble*, for example, after sensing that sophomores in their companies had struggled with new unit integration, becoming concerned for its ramifications on their own social networks. Further, use of the overlooked discourse markers *like* and *you know* may also point to their own stance in conveying this culture to others. *Like* is not meaningless; it marks locations in a text that require loose rendering, as if these narrators strenuously work to translate their experiences to an unfamiliar audience (Fox Tree, 2007). Further, saying *you know* signifies an attempt to establish common ground in an interaction (Schiffron, 1987). Indeed, as these narrators often recalled instances where they were interacting with family and

friends outside the West Point circle, *like* and *you know* are essential ingredients to communicate their experiences to others.

In the transition as task metaphor, students employ beneficial strategies to "master" the mission before them. For example, Kelly is seemingly uncertain of her abilities in certain areas, which as Belenky et al. (1997) note, is common among highly competent subjective knowers. Thus, when she speaks of accomplishing the summer ruck marches, winning an excellence award in her information technology class, and being able to run the gauntlet in her combatives class, she refers to them as "confidence boosters." Also, Alejandra's perception that her West Point education is a means to upward mobility point to her perception that this experience is merely conditional. Likewise, each of the six participants, when asked how she envisions herself twenty years into the future, quickly equates "twenty years" with an Army career, as "twenty years" is symbolic of the duration of time until a servicemember earns full military retirement. Thus, they speak of waiting until they are in the "real Army" to decide if they like it enough to remain. Emphasizing changes in occupational or social roles is typical of women who look outward for self-knowledge: "passing grades in academic or corporate structures seem to give these women rather literal rungs on a ladder for providing firm benchmarks for gauging their own progress" (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 50). The problem with the task metaphor, however, is that it conveys that transition to college is a finite and surmountable conflict. What this research illustrates is that the transition has not concluded at the end of the first semester. In the third interview series, these women still voice concern about overcoming barriers to successful academic performance, like

procrastination, fatigue, and poor organizational skills, and achieving balance with interpersonal relationships. Their concerns support the findings of Birnie-Lefcovitch (2000), whose research participants were more concerned about transitioning after the first semester than they were before the semester began. Just as organizational entry literature holds that one's self-understanding following a transition to a new situation may take about two years (Menninger, 1975), these women are not likely to feel that they have mastered transition anytime soon. As Alejandra expresses, "Eventually it'll hit me, maybe when I'm a cow [junior] or something, oh wait! I'm in college" (Alejandra, Interview 2, August 26, 2007).

Reflection in Episodes of Women's Development

Reflection, as Chapter II details, is a conscious process that usually involves further action based on new knowledge gained from introspection. A cyclical element characterizes most theories. For example, Dewey (1933) wrote, "we do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience" (p. 78); later Boud and Walker (1992) assert, "we experience as we reflect and we reflect as we experience" (p. 168). The third of my research questions concerning cadets' thoughts at days' end, attempts to capture the ongoing conversation with oneself about what is happening. As the narrators' emphasis on relationships emerged through their stories and language, I became more convinced that self-reflection is a dialogic increase in knowledge of the self, an alternate definition created by joining the social identity theories of Bakhtin (1980) and Gee (2001) with the reflection theories of Schön (1983) and Boud and Walker (1992). Manifested, dialogic increase in knowledge of the self can occur when one communicates events and experiences, the proclivity to

do so in storytelling form. In the best of conditions, narratives encourage reflexivity, the ability to reflect upon the self that occurs when the act of narration creates a split between the narrator and the protagonist of the story (Linde, 1993). Reflection not only entails a self, but also an other.

This conceptualization of reflection, however, presumes a capacity to step outside one's framework to critically evaluate a situation. The women who participated in this study, as I have mentioned, expressed themselves consistent with the silent, received knower, and subjective knower epistemologies outlined by Belenky et al. (1997). Embedded in relationships, these women are more likely to listen to others, as "a way of learning about the self without revealing the self" (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 85), a circumstance buttressed by an institutional status that rarely affords them the chance to communicate. They may not have developed the cognitive perspective to reflect in the educationalist sense of the word. Instead, they more commonly rely on noticing, "an interaction between the learner and the milieu," when a "person becomes aware of the milieu, or particular things within it," the basis for reflection-in-action but a process distinguished from reflection itself (Boud & Walker, 1990, p. 68). If they did not arrive on Reception Day with effective reflection skills, there seems to be little by way of educational intervention that helps them cultivate the noticing processes into further reflective action during the first semester of cadet life.

Thus, when I present them with a charge to tell their stories, their stories of transition are not so much laden with reflective insight as they are about daily life management. Just as Brookfield (1995) warns, "self-confirming cycles" develop, and

the stories contribute little to their own self-knowledge (p. 28). Joy, for example, acknowledges that others perceive her as laughing inappropriately, but even as she relays these encounters to me, she giggles. Alejandra is engaging as she tells stories, but at each story's end, she concludes with one-liners, such as "it was a bad experience" or "it was a blessed day," leaving the listener unfulfilled. As Fendler (2003) writes, "when reflection is understood as a turning back upon the self, the danger is that reflection will reveal no more than what is already known" (p. 21). Although they may notice a great deal about others, they may also be ignoring what is happening to themselves (Boud & Walker, 1990) in the stories they tell.

Methodological Reflections and Conclusions

Narrative research always takes place in a social context; although the narrators were involved with me in dyads seemingly suspended for the hours that we talked, in actuality, I bring those stories forth "into a community who share a world" (Grumet, 1991, p. 76). As Casey (1993) has noted, the most remarkable part of narratives is that they reveal a pattern of their own priorities. Indeed, students' narrated worlds are far more complex than surveys and questionnaires would allow. Although many times the stories lacked polished reflection, it is within their inherent grittiness that the possibilities for new insights begin. As Baxter Magolda (1992) posits, "Until students feel that what they think has some validity, it is impossible for them to view themselves as capable of constructing knowledge" (p. 376). Further, it is quite probable that, as adolescents, they had never conceived of their lives as continuum, able to be shaped into a story. Yet narratibility of one's life should not be limited to old age (Midalia, 1996). In that way, the experience for the

participants may deepen in significance, as they now carry with them the interview transcripts from three critical first points in their postsecondary experiences. "Just as it takes a long while to develop the capacity to pose questions for yourself, it takes a good deal of time before you can imagine and appreciate the questions that others pose for you," write Belenky et al. (1997), and continuing as if speaking to me, "it takes even longer to understand the importance of posing questions to others" (p. 188).

Furthermore, I designed this study with the expectation that the young women who participated would see me as a civilian, someone not in uniform, for the most part, unaffiliated with the Academy, and therefore willingly disclose. Yet throughout the interviews the participants often asked me questions or referred to my husband (such as, "I don't know if you can have coffee at West Point, can you?"; "I mean, they try to mix it up, right?"; "I don't know if I'm supposed to be saying this"; and "I'm sure your husband has . . . you know, he's had friends from his Beast company . . . that he still talks to now"), regarding my role differently than my expectation. I deflected the questions and attention (unless they inquired about good local restaurants), but was initially surprised that I was regarded as an insider. The fact that I am, indeed, living on post and married to an active-duty instructor, at times may have interfered with their ability to tell me the "rest of the story." Further, being regarded as an insider conceivably explains why Michelle was reluctant to explain any of the circumstances leading up to her resignation. I represent an "authority" with whom these women are familiar, an authority that

silent and received knowers understand has all the answers, and one that subjective knowers are just beginning to see as collegial.

The traditional literary narrative, a novel, has the advantage of resolution; readers know where the protagonist stands when the story concludes. The lives of these women are not so concluded, and although they persisted chronologically through the first semester, their stories are far from resolved. Feminist literary theory has defined heroines' patterns as more circular than linear, just as biological and social cycles define a woman's life and culture. Perhaps the best way to view these protagonists is not on a linear progression toward an end. Just as reflection and experience revolve, so, too, do the patterns in these women's lives. Leaving West Point, Michelle returns to her community of origin, incorporating this experience into prior knowledge. The other five women return for the spring semester to begin the academic semester again; as they are "scrambled" in the coming years, they inevitably create a complex web of relationships throughout the Academy. As the female *bildungsroman* attests, crises of identity are not necessarily resolved during youth; knowing that, we can be confident that forthcoming transitions will kindle more narratives about the process of becoming.

Implications

The women in this research began their transitions to college up to as many as three years prior to arriving on campus the first day of their first-year experience. In exceptional amounts of information gathering and resourcefulness, many spent time here, the year before coming; all networked with others who could give them the "inside scoop" about first-year life and military experiences. This finding is

noteworthy for educators who begin addressing transitional issues on the first day of the first year of college. These young women had already devoted significant thought to the process; however, because they were often caught unprepared, in bouts of homesickness, for example, even the lengthiest dedication of forethought did not produce an effortless transition. Students' perceptions of what they will face upon entering are potentially inaccurate or incomplete, presenting the opportunity for educators to openly address some of the "downsides" of the transition process. As was the case with Michelle, however, even long-term front-end consideration does not substitute for the experience itself, for she resigned several weeks after the end of the first semester, despite success on the field and a tight social network of varsity teammates. In addition, as Michelle's story represents, it is important that educators do not assume a third-person omniscient point-of-view: we will never know a "whole" story about a student's college transition. Even as we interact with entering students, we are part of a larger, societal performance.

Much of my analysis and conclusion draws from *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky et al., 1997); the women in this study are complexly interacting with their educational environment, mirroring the patterns of women studied in Belenky et al.'s widely accepted scholarly work. Through my research, I am not suggesting that the ways in which West Point educates disregard the ways in which women learn. Rather, by appreciating women's tendencies towards relationships in the context of college transition, I am recommending that there be further discussion about how the community among first-year students and their peers, instructors, and those outside the institution are constrained and enhanced in this particular environment.

After all, it is questionable if impersonal and rigid education produces more independent and responsible individuals. Nurturing positive relationships can strengthen the interdependence of students.

With respect to reflection, as I worked through this study, I repeatedly recalled the words of Lt. Gen. William Lennox, now former superintendent of USMA, at the opening session of the West Point Women's Conference in April 2006. Grinning, he remarks, "We give them time for reflection—a little bit of time for reflection—in their time here at the Academy, the forty-seven months here, to produce leaders of character" (Lennox, 2006). From the stories I heard, I could not identify first-semester Academy interventions to engender reflective practice. Given that the epistemologies of these students are only emergent (Belenky et al., 1997), if the Academy is sure that reflection is an essential attribute of leaders of character, it would seem reasonable to foster reflective practice early in students' careers—"what is noticed at the initial stage is of particular importance in the interaction of the learner with the milieu: 'first impressions are the strongest'" (Boud & Walker, 1990, p. 70). Like many traditional four-year institutions, West Point incorporates capstone courses and projects, although they are usually part of the upperclass curricula. But an earlier concentration on the development of reflective ability "can help to ensure that learners do not get so distracted by the dynamics of the event that they forget why they are there" (Boud & Walker, 1990, p. 70).

Recommendations for Further Research

A critique of the generic *bildungsroman* is that it exalts youth. However, as in the case of many female *bildungsroman*, development is not limited to youth; it is

a lifelong process in which critical moments may be "off-time." This present research focused on traditionally aged, late-adolescents as they began their college experiences. How might older women attending college for the first time construct their life stories? What perspectives could they reveal? Additionally, I have assumed that the transition to college is a significant part of the college experience, but it certainly is not the only element in a comprehensive college experience. What other periods in postsecondary attendance are equally, if not more, formative? To that end, a qualitative longitudinal study involving the same participants from the months prior to entering until the months following college graduation would reveal individuals' perceptions, not a researcher's assumptions, of what constitutes critical times.

Col. Deborah McDonald, recently appointed the USMA Director of Admissions, the first woman to hold that position, says that she is frequently asked "Is it hard being a woman at West Point?" to which she says, "You know, I've never been a man at West Point, so I'm not really sure what the difference is" (McDonald, as cited in Bartlett, 2008, p. 3). In this research, I have obviously (and intentionally) neglected men. As women are a minority population at West Point, I prioritized stories to understand their unique perspective. Interestingly, Johnstone (1993) has found that women's stories center on community and relationships; as previously mentioned, my findings parallel hers. Yet she also determines that men's stories focus on human physical contests and contests with nature, stories that rarely involve women. I thus raise the question about replicating this study with men to determine how men would construct and relay their stories of transition. Given the

declining number of men on American college campuses, it seems increasingly critical that educators fully comprehend their initial experiences, too.

Further studies of reflection are also warranted. As I sought to find examples of unprompted reflection through students' own stories of transition, I understand that reflection may not be an automatic response to events. Therefore, I speculate as to how reflection, if it is a desired outcome, can be best cultivated in educational settings. None of the women in this study participated in a first-year seminar course; does the enrollment within such a course foster reflective thinking? How could other courses contribute to these students' ability to reflect? What spaces outside of the classroom are teachable moments in the art and practice of reflection? Quantitative, in addition to qualitative, research studies may aid educators in understanding where and when reflection occurs.

Finally, as an entity, the first-year experience literature lacks emic perspectives from entering students. Scholar-educators who want to ensure that entering student programs and practices originate in student needs must address this paucity of published research. Carefully-designed narrative research is a source of rich descriptions which can give practitioners new information with which to assess their own practices. As narrative research proliferates, so does the ability to understand the lived experiences of transitioning students. While there is no such thing as a summative transitional experience able to be illuminated by a single story, each collected narrative provides evidence necessary to understanding the collective whole of a particular group of entering students.

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APPENDIX A
METHODOLOGICAL DOCUMENTATION

West Point IRB Approval



REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY
West Point, New York 10996

MAOR-R

20 November 2006

MEMORANDUM FOR: Kimberly Helms

SUBJECT: Human Subjects Research Review Board (HSRRB) Approval of Proposed Research Protocol

1. References:

- a. Department of Defense (DoD) Directive Number 3216.2 (dtd: 25 March, 2002), *Protection of Human Subjects and Adherence to Ethical Standards in DoD-Supported Research*.
- b. Army Regulation (AR) 40-38, *Clinical Investigation Program*.
- c. United States Military Academy (USMA) Regulation 70-1, *Research, Development and Acquisition*.
- d. USMA Policy Memorandum Number 1-00 (dtd: 26 July, 2000), *Human Subjects Research Review Board (HSRRB), MEDDAC, West Point*.

2. The HSRRB at the United States Military Academy has determined that the following research proposals are "exempt" from the approval procedures outlined in the references above.

- a. **Self-Reflection during Transition to College:
A Qualitative Understanding of Women Becoming West Point Cadets
Preliminary Dissertation Abstract**

The principal investigators are free to conduct their research IAW their recent application memorandum submitted to the HSRRB.

4. Point of contact for this memorandum is the undersigned at x7389.

//original signed//
MICHAEL J. JOHNSON
LTC, EN
Chief

UNCG IRB Approval



THE UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA
GREENSBORO

Office of Research Compliance

2718 Hall for Humanities and Research Administration
PO Box 26170, Greensboro, NC 27402-6170
336.256.1482 Phone 336.256.1482 Fax
www.uncg.edu/ocr/

April 27, 2007

Ms. Kimberly Helms
In care of Dr. Bert Goldman
Curriculum and Instruction
234 Curry Building
Refer to: IRB No.067277

Dear Ms. Helms,

As required by University policy a member of the UNCG IRB has given your research protocol entitled "Self-Reflection During Transition to College: A Qualitative Understanding of Women Becoming West Point Cadets" (IRB No. 067277) an expedited review as permitted under UNCG's Federal Wide Assurance (FWA 00000216). Your minimal risk protocol has been approved under expedited category number 6 and 7 of 45 CFR 46.110.

You should be aware that any changes in your protocol must be approved by the IRB prior to being implemented. Likewise, any problems, complaints or injuries that arise during the course of your project which involves human participants must be reported promptly to the Office of Research Compliance. The approved informed consent form is attached. This version must be used when obtaining informed consent as outlined in this protocol but stamp does not need to appear on the form.

This research protocol is valid for one year and will expire on 4-22-08. You will receive a continuing review form to keep this protocol active prior to its anniversary date. Thank you for your cooperation on this matter and best wishes on your project.

Sincerely,

Eric Allen, Director
Office of Research Compliance

Cc:

USMA Trademark Permission

To: "Kimberly Helms KTHELMS" <KTHELMS@uncg.edu>
 From: "Flowers, J. LTC(R) ODIA" <Jim.Flowers@usma.edu>
 Date: 01/17/2007 11:43AM
 Subject: RE: Trademark permission for dissertation research

Dear Kimberly, Use this E-mail as permission to use our trademarks in your dissertation. Thanks
 Jim Flowers.

From: Kimberly Helms KTHELMS [mailto:KTHELMS@uncg.edu]
Sent: Tuesday, January 16, 2007 12:48 AM
To: Flowers, J. LTC(R) ODIA
Subject: Trademark permission for dissertation research

Dear Mr. Flowers:

I am in the early stages of preparing a dissertation about cadet lives at USMA, for which I have received approval from the Office of Policy, Planning, and Analysis. Reading a book by Lance Janda, I noticed that he received permission to use the terms "West Point," "United States Military Academy," and "USMA." Will I, too, need permission to use these terms in my final manuscript or follow-on papers? How and when do I request approval? I will also need to use the term "The long gray line."

Respectfully,
 Kimberly Helms

Kimberly Turner Helms
 Doctoral Student
 Higher Education Curriculum & Instruction
 The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
 kthelms@uncg.edu

Initial Interest Email

Dear Cadet Candidate:

Congratulations on your acceptance to West Point!

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Kimberly Turner Helms, and I am a doctoral graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I am hoping to enlist your help. My dissertation research is about women who have chosen to attend the United States Military Academy at West Point. For the study to take place, I am looking for volunteers to be interviewed by me, only. Here are the details:

I would interview you before Reception Day, July 2, 2007, most likely when you come to the West Point community in the days prior to R-Day.

I would interview you again during the first week of class, most likely during the weekend of August 25-26, 2007.

I would interview you a final time after first semester final examinations ("Term Ends"), depending on your schedule, but during the week of December 15-21, 2007.

You should expect interviews to last anywhere from 1-3 hours, for a total commitment of 3-9 hours.

All interviews will take place in my home, located in the West Point garrison community.

If you choose to participate, your confidentiality will be ensured.

To participate in this research, you must be over the age of 18.

The Academy has given me approval to conduct this study and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research involving people follows federal regulations, has approved the project. The views expressed by my study do not represent the official policy of the United States Government, the Department of Defense, the United States Army, or the United States Military Academy, nor am I an employee of these organizations. My spouse is a Major in the Army, a graduate of USMA, and is currently an instructor in the Department of Mathematics.

If you are interested in participating, please complete the information on the response Website (<http://fs8.formsite.com/kthelms/form045178820/index.html>) between May 22, 2007 and June 8, 2007. I will contact you with further details soon after. If you have questions about this research, you may email me (kthelms@uncg.edu) or call me at 845.859.4460, or you may contact my research advisor, Dr. Bert Goldman, at bagoldma@uncg.edu. Thank you, and best wishes.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Turner Helms

Interested Participant Internet Response Form(created using <https://www.formsite.com>)

Interested in participating in a research study on women attending West Point? Please complete the form below.

My name is Kimberly Turner Helms, and I am a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. My dissertation research is about women who have chosen to attend the United States Military Academy at West Point. The views expressed by my study do not represent the official policy of the United States Government, the Department of Defense, the United States Army, or the United States Military Academy, nor am I an employee of these organizations. Feel free to contact me at kthelms@uncg.edu or 845.859.4460. Thank you for your interest!

*** First Name***** Last Name***** Address 1****Address 2***** City***** State * Postal Code***** Phone***** Email Address***** Best Time to Contact**

*** What is your high school graduation year?**☐

2007

☐

2006

☐

2005

☐

2004

- ☐ 2003
- ☐ 2002
- ☐ Other

* When will you be arriving in the West Point/Highland Falls area prior to Reception Day, July 3, 2007?

- ☐ Monday, July 2, 2007
- ☐ Sunday, July 1, 2007
- ☐ Saturday, June 30, 2007
- ☐ Friday, June 29, 2007
- ☐ Thursday, June 28, 2007
- ☐ Wednesday, June 27, 2007
- ☐ Tuesday, June 26, 2007
- ☐ I'm not sure yet
- ☐ Other

* Indicates Response Required

CONSENT FORM

Position of Interviewee: Cadet candidate New cadet Cadet

Date and Time of Interview:

Place:

Interviewer: Kimberly Helms [kthelms@uncg.edu; 845.859.4460]

Interviewee:

My dissertation research is about women who have chosen to attend the United States Military Academy at West Point. The views expressed by my study do not represent the official policy of the United States Government, the Department of Defense, the United States Army, or the United States Military Academy, nor am I an employee of these organizations.

Procedures & Consent:

I am inviting you to participate in a research project about your experiences before, during, and after your first semester of college. I will ask you in-person to answer open-ended questions. I will audiorecord, transcribe, and analyze your answers. I will keep the recordings for seven years, then destroy the files. There are no known risks associated with this study. There are no known benefits that may reasonably be expected to result from this study. Your participation in this interview may take a total of up to several hours over three different occasions. If at any point during the study you decide to withdraw from the United States Military Academy, you may still choose to complete the interview process. You have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation in my study at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you were to report an incident of sexual assault, I am obligated under the USMA Sexual Assault Response Policy to contact the Special Assistant to the Commandant for Human Relations, who will protect your confidentiality, officially document the incident, and discuss reporting options with you.

Your privacy and confidentiality will be maintained at all times before, during, and after the study, as well as in final publication(s). Data from this research will be presented to the University community. The results may be written up for publication or for conference presentations. You will receive a copy of this consent form.

I give consent to be audiorecorded during this study:

please initial: ☐ Yes ☐ No

I give consent for transcripts resulting from this study to be used in the researcher's project:

please initial: ☐ Yes ☐ No

SIGNATURE _____ **DATE** _____

Interview Protocol

Preferred Pseudonym:

Key Interview Question:

(first interview) I'm interviewing women who attend West Point. Tell me the story of your life.

(second interview) Bring me up to date on the story of your life.

(third interview) a) Bring me up to date on the story of your life. b) How do you see yourself twenty years from now?

Possible Probes

Tell me more about that.

What was that experience like for you?

Researcher's Notes

DEBRIEFING

Thank you for your participation. Your responses will remain confidential. I will provide you a transcript of this interview, which you may review and offer corrections. You may also contact me at any point if you have additional information to share or questions to ask.

Confidentiality Agreement

This study is being undertaken by Kimberly Helms as part of the dissertation requirement at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The purpose of the project is to examine self-reflection during the transition time to college. Primarily, I am interested in how individual women students make meanings of their experiences during the time span in which those experiences are happening.

Data from this research will be presented to the University community. The results may be written up for publication or conference presentations.

Project Title: Self-Reflection during Transition to College: A Qualitative Understanding of Women Becoming West Point Cadets

I, _____ agree to keep any research information shared with me or viewed by me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g., transcripts, emails, audiofiles) with anyone other than the Researcher.

(print name)

(signature)

(date)

Researcher

(print name)

(signature)

(date)

If you have any questions or concerns about this study please contact:
Kimberly Turner Helms
845.859.4460

APPENDIX B
SELECTED PHOTOGRAPHS

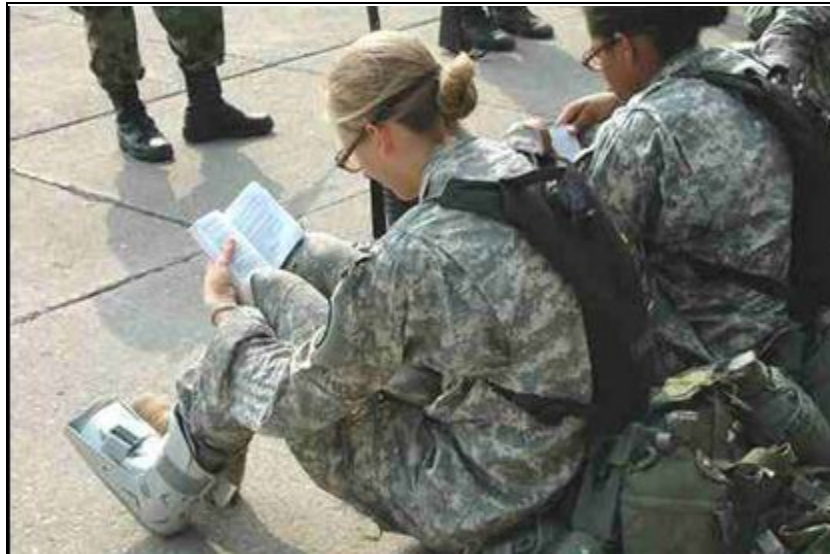
The following photographs are illustrative of selected experiences and activities at USMA. Unless otherwise noted, the author took photographs.



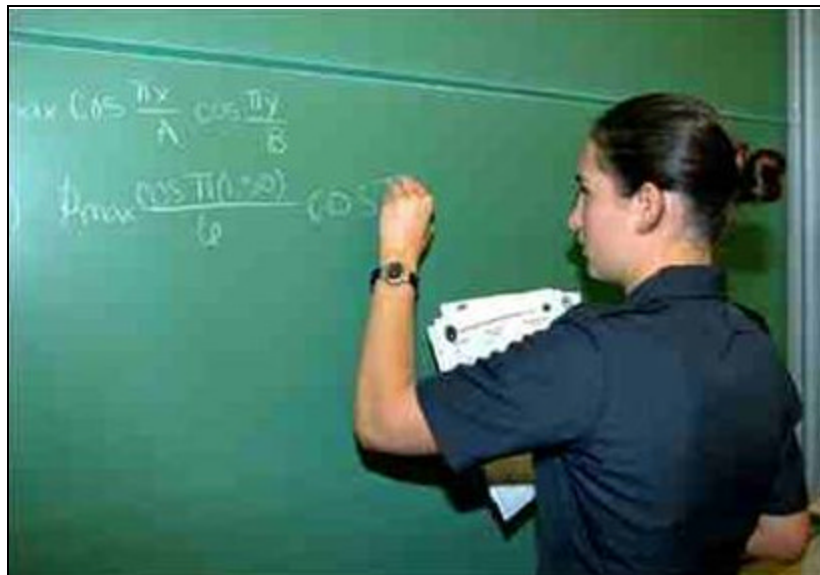
View of the parade field; Washington Hall (the mess hall); cadet barracks; and the Cadet Chapel.
(Photo courtesy of Dr. Frank Wattenberg)



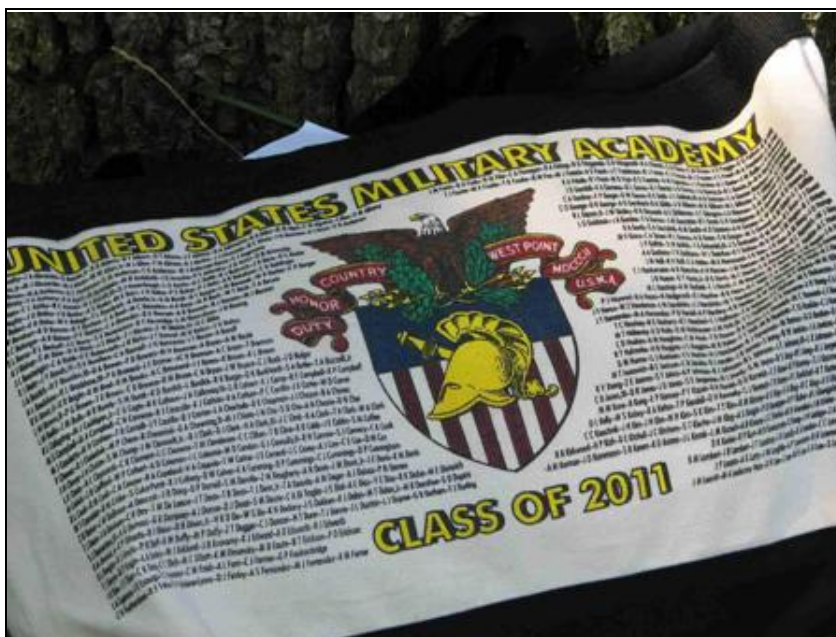
Reporting to the Cadet in the Red Sash on Reception Day.
(Photo courtesy of USMA)



A cadet "on profile" reads Plebe Knowledge after the Cadet Basic Training marchback.
(Photo courtesy of USMA)



A cadet "takes boards," part of the Thayer Method, during math class.
(Photo courtesy of USMA)



Class of 2011 Tote Bag; includes the names of all entering 1305 cadets.



Class of 2011 Marchback, August 13, 2007.
The class motto is chosen during Cadet Basic Training.



Plebes doing trash duties.



On a guided tour during the West Point Women's Conference, the presence of a notorious yellow laundry cart provides alumnae with "fond" memories.



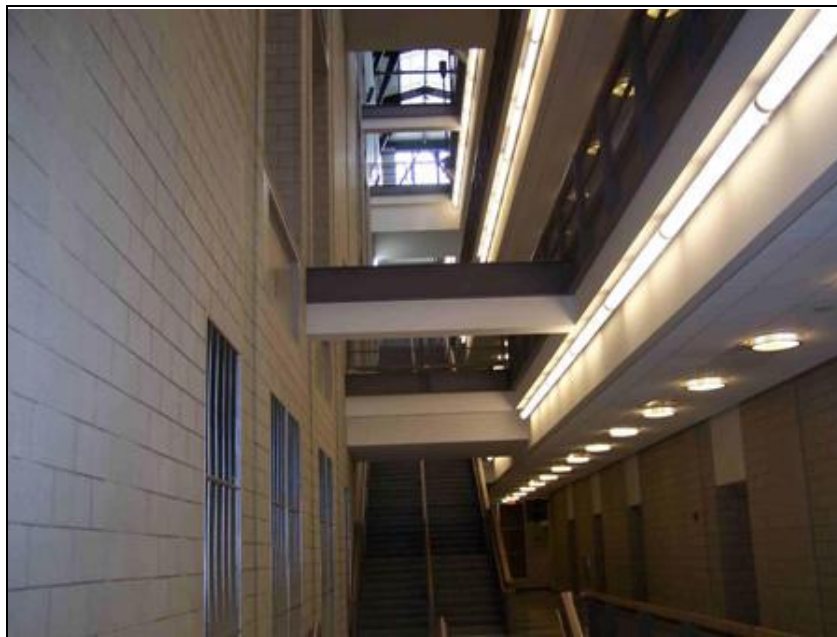
Cadet wardrobe.
(Photo courtesy of research participant.)



Inspection-ready boots and shoes.
(Photo courtesy of research participant.)



A cadet spends her afternoon engaged in individual physical training.



Inside the renovated Arvin Cadet Physical Development Center.



School spirit is ubiquitous.



Dressed in "civvies," a cadet prepares for a Friday evening away from post (she is not a plebe).



2005-2006 Brigade Staff, led by then-1st Cpt. Stephanie Hightower.
(Photo courtesy of USMA)



Active-duty and civilian alumnae march in review during a parade honoring 30
years of women at West Point. April 27, 2006